

E U R O P A
Through Indian Eyes

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BY
DEBESH DAS
I. C. S.



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LONGMANS, GREEN & CO., LTD.

6 & 7 CLIFFORD STREET, LONDON W. 1

AND AT

NEW YORK, TORONTO, CAPE TOWN AND MELBOURNE

First Published February 1956

Price: Rs. 5

PRINTED IN INDIA

By J. N. BOSE, AT THE INDIAN PRESS LTD.,
93A DHARAMTOLLA STREET, CALCUTTA 13

TO
SARVEPALLI RADHAKRISHNAN
WHO IS INTERPRETING US
TO OURSELVES
AND TO THE
WEST

TAGORE'S FOREWORD

(To the Bengali edition).

Your EUROPA has given me special joy mainly because, unlike many other writers of our country, you have not tried to belittle Europe. You have whole-heartedly realised her greatness and beauty. It is not possible to see a well civilised and new country in the true perspective if one cannot keep one's vision clear and happy. You have seen Europe with a joyous heart and communicated that joy to the reader.

(Translated)

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

It will be but natural to question the utility of these pictures of Europe after the last World War.

But I have not tried to portray only that Europe which is fast disappearing and which, even when reconstructed, will not come back in her pristine form. The dream land of imaginative young men like me is often broken up and thrown down from its plane of peace and prosperity. Still man yearns to re-live again and again those golden times, to recapture those happy haunting memories. If there is any element of utility in that yearning 'Europa' will not have been in vain.

Moreover, Europe hardly sees herself through the eyes of a foreigner, particularly an Oriental. Given to philosophic introspection, he is likely to see her from an angle of vision not ordinarily used in the West. The eternal elements that Europe has underneath her ephemeral crust are meant for the world at large and not for Europe exclusively. The more people come in search of them, not stopping with her exterior trappings and materialism, the better the prospect of humanity achieving poise and peace.

The West, too, has a duty to herself, to see and judge herself through other people's eyes. Ego and expansive soul go ill together. In the midst of her material progress and prosperity she can no doubt lie snugly, but some of her own creations threaten to destroy her along with others. Her intellectuals are realising the danger and therein lies the hope for the safety of the nascent East as well as the salvation of the nurtured West.

These articles were written in lonely camp life under the shadow of Indian hills and villages. While the life of many aboriginal tribes unfolded themselves, the memory of modern civilised races of Europe frequently came back to me. I hope the entirely different background and the distance of time have not interfered with my original impressions.

In Europe, while having a busy time as an Honours' student in the London University, a member of the Inns of Court and a candidate preparing for the I.C.S., then the summum bonum of an Indian student, I never wanted to feel like a stranger marking time abroad. It was a sojourn in the promised land. This book is but an inadequate expression of the memories and the regard associated with Europe. She has enabled me to see my own country in a new light. For that, if not for anything else, I am grateful to her.

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I DO NOT WANT TO DIE

A golden beam of the morning sun leaps into my room. I lie half-awake. The dawn is just creeping round the corner. I hear the birds chirp, a flitter in my poultry yard, a stir in my garden. Somebody is whistling a tune. A faint refrain of an old song comes back to my mind. "I do not want to die in this world of beauty". Did he? Who does?

I become wide awake. I notice over there, on the table the letter read so many times last night. Ten years back it was written to me from England—my English friend's last letter.

It brings me with a whip face to face with reality. Behind the peaceful dawn in its first flush peeps inexorable fate like the merciless Indian sun, red in tooth and claw. I read the oft-read letter once again. Yes, it is ten years since, ten fateful years flowing on into eternity. Meanwhile nations have risen and fallen and crumbled into dust, and are trying to recover again.

I feel the passionate yearning for life that breathes in every line of the letter. I feel the quick pulsation of a mounting heartbeat. Life, love and laughter—all that a young married couple desire in this world of beauty. With all its music and dreams, music still unrehearsed, dreams yet to be fulfilled. The smell of the honeymoon is still round them and the cup of life bubbling over with joy. Suddenly something snaps. Three capital letters stare one in the face, *WAR*.

I read the letter once again. It seems so unreal in to-day's context. I feel the heart-bruise even now. My friend is English and his bride Danish but the shadow of the four horsemen of the Apocalypse is over both. The country of his recently-married wife had already been overrun by the Nazis, his own country was standing like the last tree that keeps its head somehow above the flood of waters madly swirling round it. And he would have to enlist on the morrow. His country needed him. I can almost hear the thud of boots. Heavy and rhythmic. Poignant.

My friend wrote, "The whole world is crashing round us. The mighty tidal waves of destruction are rumbling in my ears. It is sad, unspeakably sad, to leave behind a bride of

yesterday. Still I would like to quote here a line from your country's poet to whom you often referred—"I do not want to die in this beautiful earth. I want to live as a man among men."

The call of silent death brings home to me the intense desire for life. I do not want to give up the latter. My friend did not. Who does? Death only serves to reveal in its fulness the beauty of life. I do not want to die.

Even then for full six years what a grim dream of death and of destruction, deadlier than death itself, was staged in Europe. Dare anybody measure up the extent and effect of it? The human values, even more than man himself, are among the casualties. The pre-war Europe of mine still beckons to me but seems to efface herself like a sweet, fleeting dream of yesterday. A weary traveller am I in this Europe of to-day. With a heart heavy with sorrow and tenderness I go over battle fields, convulsed rural areas and towns and want to walk in memory's garden. But where, oh, where is that Europe whose enchanting sweetness and unending life brought new light to my life? The garland of joy she wove for me gunpowder cannot wither, nor atom bomb blast. Find her I must and in this torn world itself.

Often have my moments of utopian joy and useless sorrow been made sweet by the memory of Europe. Her pictures crowd in my mind and light up its innermost corner. They defy this carnival of death, this procession of destruction and cover them up with a merciful film of a greater life. The night of desolation gives way to the dawn of delight, the delight of recreation. Indeed I will get back my Europa in the midst of a topsy turvy world.

The touch of the eternal that Europe lends to mankind in the midst of the ephemeral is found in the varied expression of man's emotions, his joys and sorrows and love. She has never lost her soul. She has never forgotten man in spite of political upheavals. She has her interminable wars, like others. She has her materialistic instinct. But all these have not been able to completely absorb her century after century. That is why the distance of these ten years has not been able to remove from my vision the elements of eternity that lie in her pictures.

One afternoon I was walking down an unfamiliar street in old Nuremberg. There I had dabbled in the mysteries of the historic castle. In one room were kept the ancient arms and instruments of torture of prisoners. The very next room was one where a fair princess used to sigh for her knight-errant. Here was kept a quaint lyre formerly accustomed to her dainty fingers. With my rude and disrespectful fingers I tried to stir up some tune on the old strings of this romantic lyre. In rushed a batch of curious sight-seers. They thought I was a musician and expected an Indian melody from me. But they had not paid at the gates for an exhibition of my music. I reminded them of this with an assumed air of gravity. But the ripple of smiles that I tried in vain to suppress proved rather embarrassing.

Probably amusement mixed with embarrassment was playing on my face on my way back from the castle. Suddenly a young Scotsman got hold of me on the street and wanted to share the fun.

"Indeed, what fun, my friend", I asked though my eyes betrayed me.

"Ask yourself, George, you know better", was the pleasantly obstinate reply.

No, he would not let me go. Here was somebody who spoke his language and has probably seen his country. So he must share my amusement if I let him. In fact he was dying to speak in English. But how could he make this odd request to a stranger, not even his countryman? So the reference to a joke might produce a response and pave the way to friendship. That is why he had accosted me in this fashion.

How can one help being friendly to a man of such sunny temperament? Moreover, most likely he has the key to the heart of the Nuremberger. One who can get under another's skin so quickly must have successfully left behind his foreign stamp and insularity. Many an unknown man must have become known to him in a trice.

That night we went down to a seventeenth century underground cellar for our late dinner. Old wine was being drunk off ancient goblets of that century. People passed their hands through each other's to bring the drinks to their own lips. A very trifling but significant process to express community friendship. It also took shape in the song they were singing

to the tune of the band. Beautiful is the stream of Rhine but still more beautiful is the maid of the Rhine in whose blue eyes the river mirrors itself. on whose shoulders golden hair flows down in a Rhine-like stream. So you drink to the Rhine the 'sparkling Rhine'.

What a song and what an ecstasy! And what a romantic way of drinking arm in arm! Oh, the joy of seeing others enjoy themselves. My heart expanded and responded to the atmosphere. Everybody was carried away by the band, the song and the reference to the Rhine. But my friend from the bonnie land of Burns? On his face was a trace of sadness, in his heart a touch of pain. Was it the memory of some love? Or some love forgotten? Or some unutterable emotion tinged with both joy and sorrow, memory and oblivion, light and shade that found expression in the half-forgetful automatic part taken by him in the chorus of the Rhine song? I remembered Burns—

"My heart is sair,
I dare na' tell".

But let there be pain in his heart. The sportive cheerfulness of that sparkling night was sweeping everybody along with it. There was no difference between a native and a foreigner. This was no mere eating place but a rest-house for bruised souls. Everybody was drunk with wine and music. Every heart felt happy.

Who says that broken glass and broken heart cannot be mended? They can be. It is a question of the angle of vision. Europe's new outlook, new demands on life, new philosophy of accepting life in a hundred ways are continuously applying the magic balm over sorrow and heartbreak. She knows how to put plaster over damaged goods. She has a peculiar chemical, or psychological as you may call it, process of her own by which she makes mind dynamic and sorrow bearable. Thanks to the same process, not only individuals nor some countries in particular, but the soul of Europe survives time and again in spite of the upheavals of war and politics. Ever and anon does the music of humanity rise above their noise and make itself heard and appreciated. In Europe nobody goes under for good. It does not take long for the

civilian to fly peacefully in the sky after the fearful parade of the bombers is over. Death rides the sky during wars, but so does life at the earliest opportunity thereafter. Villages and towns in new plans come up to wipe off the traces of ruin. Fresh, green grass soon covers up the desert of destruction.

As I go on musing about the war the thought of a newly-married couple, fellow-travellers with me on the Rhine, comes back to me. They both belonged to the Saar but the wife was French and the husband German. There was love in their heart but worry in their eyes. They were anxiously discussing their future and I was eavesdropping.

No. I did not really eavesdrop. Much of their anxious conversation was being wafted across to my unwilling ears. What should I have done? If I were to move aside they would understand the reason and feel out of gear. On the other hand if I pretended not to understand, as I easily could as a foreigner, no harm would come by them. If there was anything wrong in it I would gladly accept the penalty on the Judgment Day for their sake. Just a little sin, you young sinner!

W. I am feeling worried. Have you read this morning's tageblatt? War seems inevitable.

H. Nothing will happen. Don't forget we are on our honeymoon.

W. Nothing happens to-day. But later on?

H. Oh, I don't know. And even if there is war, we stay together as we are.

W. No, we can't. War will snatch you away from me.

H. No, no, that can't happen. You are no longer French. You are my wife.

W. In war that does not help. During the last war foreigner wives were interned.

H. Please do not think of that to-day.

W. Oh, I am not thinking. I am by you. I can't think of anything else now.

H. That's right, ma chere, we've no time to think of war.

Everybody was silent for a while. Only the waters of the river broke into wavelets as they touched the steamer and sparkled under the sun just as their whispers awakened thoughts, heavy thoughts, in my heart and lit up tender sympa-

thies. Hill fortresses on both banks of the river began to come down the pages of history, silent witnesses of the tragedies of the past. Slowly the pair broke into conversation again. They changed their roles now.

II. Listen. I am beginning to get worried. But if war does break out what's the use of worrying. The days we have before that tragedy are an eternity. Let's enjoy that. Come closer.

W. Why worry? Nothing will happen. I am sorry, I have spoilt the day.

II. No, no, you have done right. We must think of these things now. We must prepare the country against another war.

W. Yes, we must. War and war and war. We saw our parents in it. We too may be in it.

H. Who knows, our children also.

W. No, most certainly not. We must save our children. We won't bring them to life to send them to such a death.

II. But look, how the Disarmament Conference has failed.

W. Let it. Henderson was not big enough for the ideal. But we women are all thinking in this line. We shall save the peace. You will see.

It did not appear to me that the husband could put much faith in this assurance for the future, but the wife's face beamed with idealism no less than the shimmering waters of the Rhine breaking up into radiant stars behind the steamer.

The husband slowly withdrew, and, conscious for the first time of my presence near by, asked me, "Monsieur, do you think there will be war?"

As history has shown, they and people like them and all other champions of peace and universal brotherhood failed and Hitler won. He launched upon a career of war. The chariot of his ambition rode over the mutilated bodies and ideals of millions in the world till it met its ignoble end.

A picture postcard of the Rhine with the joint signatures of that couple is still with me. A couple whose only passport in life was love. They offered to each other not their strength but their weakness. But gone is probably their haven of peace which for the moment triumphed over their fear of war. Death probably dissolved their tie of marriage. Statecraft

lulls into sleep the finer feelings of humanity. And so does politics in the case of individuals. If love is in the way it gets crushed like a flower thrown into a whirling engine. In the present scheme of things man is dedicated to the state from his very birth. Even nationalism numbs the brotherhood of man.

But the spirit of man rises in revolt and time and again brings to us messages of hope and love and sympathy. States may rise and fall and politics change. But humanity does not. That is why in age after age new joint signatures of loving couples are put down in the picture cards of our hearts all the war-time and post-war miseries notwithstanding.

Yet another picture takes shape this lovely morning against the background of a dreamy autumn sky. Old book-shops always attract me and give a shake-up to my imagination. I always fancy that while handling old books I might chance to lay my hands on an ancient manuscript that would make me famous overnight. In my student days in the London University I often remembered that life after all was an expression of chance. Accidents lie behind many well-known historic or scientific discoveries. Who knows—a similar accident may bring me recognition through some historic book! It may be a dear old doddering man who is the innocent proprietor of an old bookshop. But he does not know that some book in his stock has within its pages a dried up rose-petal redolent with the memory of an Arabian sheharzadi or Greek lady poet. Or probably a book is waiting that very evening with a secret code within for an unsuspected enemy agent. What if perchance the code or the conspiracy reveals itself to me, instead of to him? So old book-shops always invite me within. The light of knowledge and the darkness within both awaken my mind. That is how I once went down to a basement shop in the Latin Quarters of Paris. There was a coffee-house also behind. But did I myself realise then the fringe of what mighty discovery I had set my feet on that night?

I stumbled over a group of research workers who were discussing atomic energy, the likely process of their nuclear bombardment and why previous attempts in that direction had failed. They were outlining the miracles of science that the atom could produce if its primary energy could be successfully harnessed. Where are those scientists to-day? Were they purely devotees of science or trying to evolve a formula for

political ends? Did secret service agents keep watch over them even in those days? Could they unravel the secret in the laboratories and use it for the welfare of humanity or were they diverted to the path of death, to the discovery of a bomb as inexorable as fate itself?

Who would answer?

But the whole world is putting this question to science to-day. Why did you open up the way to universal death while engaged in the quest of a welfare measure for mankind? Instead of an elixir of life you have produced an engine of death. Where, oh where, oh West, have gone all the human values and our sense of synthesis? In the lightning flash of one atom bomb the eyes of the world went blind to the faith in its own destiny. The rubble of death made man deaf to the message of life on earth.

If this be the inevitable end why need we be in raptures over this green earth, its love and beauty, art and culture? Over our homes of peace and sweetness, our near and dear ones? Have we brought them into being only for destruction at somebody else's dictate? 'Creation is athirst in man's genius. His poetry and fine arts, scientific discoveries and deeper instincts, are all these to be returned to the dust, to the atomic stage to which their ultimate genesis can be traced? Not these alone, but together with them the progress of civilisation and the accumulation of knowledge through centuries? Matthew Arnold has said that each individual is like an island removed from all others by the saline sea of separation. Civilisation has been created to bring us nearer each other. But will planes and ships now shorten the distance to facilitate not fraternity but fatal strife? Will ships transport enemy troops and planes winged death? Is this the fruit of the quest of truth and knowledge through the ages? No. The human spirit cannot accept this. That is why everywhere in the East and the West the cry of the unvanquished human soul has gone forth,—save the eternal man from his devilish double.

The greatest assets of man are his creative ability and genius. One creates and the other develops him. During my stay in Europe I have seen both these principles at work. But life force has yet another function to perform. Side by side goes on the cycle of death which none can entertain or escape. But then after all this progress of civilisation and liberal edu-

creation, will destruction prevail over creation and development? Will that be so?

No thinker to-day is prepared to agree to this. But we have gone far forward in the race of discovery of the engines of war. We cannot retrace our steps even if now we want to. In the Indian epic, the Mahābhārata, there is the story of a voluntary abandonment of all arms into the sea after a large scale fratricidal war. To-day we cannot bring ourselves to such a sacrifice. But then how far and how long must humanity tread the way to mass destruction?

That is why the West has already become alive to this question. It is being asked why the knowledge aimed at the welfare of mankind has been utilised for working out its destruction. Did the West want this? Does peace mean only the victory over the vanquished? The human spirit must triumph over itself. Let that be the fervent desire in every heart.

This was the quest in which the East was deep in meditation from ancient times and her quest has not yet ended. She asked what she had to do with things that could not give her immortality. When all round us hate, suspicion and death are taking their toll let the ancient spiritual quest of the East and the modern material progress of the West combine for the good of humanity. Neither can fulfil herself without the other. The knowledge of both spirit and matter is required for the sake of civilisation. That way only can life conquer death.

DESTINATION UNKNOWN

The spring feeling was in the blood infecting me with vague longings for the unknown. From my window I had seen the gorgeous pageant of the seasons pass, spring with its promise and summer with its fulfilment. All through I had the yearning to roam about and feel the first gentle awakening of the spring round me and the appearance of blossoms on the tree. I longed for the return of the swallow, the playfulness of sea gulls, the change of colour in the very leaves of the birch. I kept myself ready for the appearance of the black bird. Not a day did I miss the welcome call of the skylark; not a day did I want to give up my quest for the sudden sprouting of the crocus. This was my England, my England.

Autumn appeared with its ripe experience and my examinations were just over. That spring feeling of mine came out of its captivity. No more for me the prison walls of duty. They disappeared as if in a gust of wind or dissolved in rains. Now I must go out anywhere. Anywhere, off the beaten track.

But how to spend my holiday? Which way shall I take myself out through the hedges of the shady country lanes to feel the touch of the last dying violets, the blossoming of the lilac and the laburnum in the warmth of the lengthening days? And where to search for them? By what brookside in the sleepy secluded Surrey? In what smiling field in the downs of Sussex?

Not even for a day did this England appear new to me. Nor indeed did I feel a stranger. The English village green of my imagination, the village of Thomas Hardy, the smiling village of the May festival with its maples and poplars fitted in exactly with what I discovered here. I had acquaintance with this village through the pages of literature. Here the sun shines but does not burn. Nature smiles but does not frown. Here, like the pastoral shepherd, I shall enjoy in perfect bliss the smell of the gorse under the greenwood tree and hum a song.....

Lying in the hay all day

I feel as lazy as the hazy summer day.

Here indeed I shall watch with joy how Nature warms up under the tender kisses of the sun and shall realise under its

mellow rays how Charles Lamb could "feel ripening with the orangery."

The examinations are now over and so is summer. But I won't regret. Is it not autumn when the kings of my country used to set out on conquest? So shall I too, but alone and on foot. Not for me the chariot and the horses, the trumpets and banners unfurled. Our ancient kings used to let a white horse loose through other peoples' kingdoms and give battle to anyone daring enough to impede its progress. My mind is a horse unbridled, prancing restlessly to go wherever it wills. Wherever the environments are new and so are the faces. Wherever I shall not be troubled with the careful punctuality and hidebound conventions of urban life.

One evening three new members of the Youth Hostel Association were found climbing up Princess Street in Edinburgh with rucksacks on their backs. No, not a banjo on my knee. A bulging rucksack on my back. Only a few hours' run from London and a big city to boot. But the castle perching above Princess Street already began to whisper to me the commencement of my trail into the romantic. The castle reared its head above the houses and beckoned me to peer more closely. Naturally, my gaze rested on the Holyrood palace and I recalled Queen Mary. The very thought stirred me to the depths.

I started moving about in the border area with Edinburgh as headquarters. I would consider the whole of the border as Scott's country, because it is his pen which has made it so romantic and full of life. The country and the scenery we get in his description remain still the same though the human beings of that lovable age are no more. The ruins of Melrose Abbey are still there. The same still and sad beauty in which Scott saw it in the Lay of the Last Minstrel remains still the same. But the magician Michael Scott cannot be found there any more. The streams running down the Cheviot Hills even now swirl and sweep down in chestnut foam but no magicians' chants are mixed in their pretty babble. Can any supernatural beauty suddenly arise out of the calm depths of the Trossachs to-day?

Let her not. But Scott country or Burn's' country is none the less beautiful for all that.

My roaming about does not end here. Out northwest lie

the lonely Highland hills away from civilisation, where the sky keeps looking on towards the silence of the mountain lakes and the Atlantic calls out to them. Thither lies my way.

The autumn sky is softened with clouds. Our train is sauntering by the feet of the Grampian ranges. All the way streams and waterfalls play about and the soft vague smell of heather seems bewitching. The famous Caledonian horizon is overcast with mellow clouds. In the desert you need not tell the camel where he has come. Nor have you got to tell one in the Highlands where he is. This country touches your innermost heart through all your senses and makes itself felt closely, very closely. The deep gray clouds above, the soft bronze of heather on the hills, the carefree ramble of the deer and the deep rumble of the clouds everywhere. I go back to my Kalidasa, the eternal Sanskrit poet:—

A mild vapour rises all round
As first rains kiss the ground,
The *Kadamba is half in bloom,
The peacock spreads its plume.

The picture of the cloud covered forests of the Sanskrit epic Ramayana also came to my mind. Rama, the prince in exile for fourteen years, had to roam about in forests with his wife Sita and brother Lakshmana who followed him just out of loyalty to the elder brother who should have been on the throne but was deprived of it through the machinations of the wily stepmother. The same type of wooded forests and hill-slopes in their primeval grandeur are here. And we are three.

We take the train to Achnashellach, a name no decent student of geography will care to know. As we pass through the Grampians our interest grows. I feel that every bend of the railway track brings us nearer the land of the kilts. The zigzag railway cannot continue for ever. It is strange how mind loves to dwell on contrasts. Imperceptibly my mind goes back to the desert. In the desert one may be lured by what one thinks to be the smell of the oasis; but here from the train I can smell the Highlands as the wine-coloured heather sways gently on the slope of the hills. From my window I watch them with emotion. Not the stern and wild Caledonia but hills, soft and purple-clad even in the distance. As we get

* A tropical flower of the rains associated with romance.

down at the station and walk a mile down the slope to reach the hostel, we visualise the climbing that is in store for us on the morrow. Our hiking proper starts from a place where there are no press reporters. Nor indeed did I need any, as I come to find out shortly.

A wet misty morning. The winding path flings itself round the shoulders of hill after hill, rising continuously in naked grandeur. On the left is a steep cliff, afire in the autumn with rowan berries and the scarlet heaps of unknown flowers. On the right is a deep gorge with a bed of bracken which a few days later will look yellow and bronze. But we walk fast and leave behind the last traces of human dwelling. It starts raining and yet we begin to feel intolerably warm. So we take off our coats and put on the rain coat over the now none too civilised shirt and shorts.

That road can lead nobody to Rome. The only place it can lead to is the hill where reign eternal silence in sleepless vigil, the grandeur of heather stretches and an indescribable smell of peat wet with rains. There hangs also an atmosphere of pristine peace though perhaps many a tale of hate and bloodshed among different clans lies mixed with that colour of the heather, now looking lovely in its lonely setting.

Gradually the path grows steeper, its windings more crooked and its surface flintier. I forget that we have fifteen more miles of such track to cover and begin to expect a flat path round every corner. Already my Indian bones have started cursing the rucksack. What's the use of this piece of loaf, this tin of fruit salad or this extra pair of grey bags if the bearer does not enjoy the burden? The foodstuff I would carry rather inside me than outside. The very thought sharpens my appetite. But what after that? Is there any Highland-bred horse—no, I am thinking of those well-broken high bred ones—waiting for me after the regal repast?

Horses turn my thoughts towards the feet which have by now begun to talk in addition to treading. I try to console them by saying, "You don't belong to me, but to my boots. Why, then, oh gentle ones, do you trouble me?"

But no response comes forth. Nor does any hollyhock or honeysuckle wave its charming head to invite me to a hospitable cottage round the corner. Nor would there be any repetition of that beautiful folklore in which the sailor, tired of his

life out on the seas, asks for shelter and the hospitable villager replies, "Yes, I can give you shelter and also my charming daughter, provided you give up your mariner's life." Where is that villager now? Where can we expect the rest offered by his roof. If I do find him by any chance I shall have time to think of other things to-morrow.

The hostel at Slattadale on Loch Maree. The sky has partially cleared up and the fleecy clouds are fleeing away. The limpid waters of the lake weave fantastic forms in the shimmering light. What primeval wilderness on the hills on the other bank, what sombre solitude! And what ethereal shivers straight through my spine pass from my tired feet dipped in the water. I magnify in my mind the achievements of this first day of hiking. I have climbed hills that take some knowing, lonely, forbidding, almost unmolested in their setting. I feel thrilled when I think of my grand plan of covering the Highlands, the Hebrides and the English lake districts as well. Many places I shall visit, places untrodden by any Indian student before. The very idea tickles me.

Evening is the time for getting to know others—fellow boarders for the night. The hostels are about twelve to twenty miles away from one another and situated by a barn or lake or the sea. A farm house would be a favourite place for housing an unsophisticated hostel. There will be at least two dormitories, one for boys and another for girls. Straw palliasses on the floor with three blankets invite the tired traveller at the end of the day's journey and the post-dinner comparison of notes with one another. You regulate the number of blankets on or under you according to the weather and the warmth of blood you have worked up during the day's hike. But the greatest fun is in the common room which one does not want to leave until one begins to drowse.

These hostels provide excellent facilities for touring through the countryside in one's own way which may be so different from the accepted American way. People of small means, students and all sorts of young people, take advantage of these hostels and spend a week or two walking and climbing. In them you get the dormitories, cooking arrangements and a common room crowded with people with common interest. What more is needed for an enjoyable holiday? And yet if it is, look round and be happy at other people's happiness. A

traveller you are, may be from a distant county or even country, but you are not the Indian Yogi whose joy is in renunciation. And yet crimson, the passport of the Yogi, may dye your heart instead of your robes. For, has not Omar Khayyam, your favourite Persian poet said,

“Here with a Loaf of Bread beneath the Bough
A Flask of Wine, a Book of Verse—and Thou
Beside me singing in the Wilderness
And Wilderness is Paradise enow.”?

Yes. You may come out hiking with a friend or you may start feeling a new warmth hitherto not experienced and start muttering.

“I wonder what thou and I did
Till we loved.”

And if you do, you would not be offending the laws of the Medes and the Persians for as the celebrated Indian poet of the love of Rādhā and Krishna has sung in his “Song Divine” (Gita Govinda by Jayadeva).

“When it is springtime
It’s sad to be alone”

But amidst this lonely grandeur of Nature you are never alone. If you have no companion for yourself, even if you do not find any company in Nature you can have a distant communion with the joy of others, fellow travellers for the day. I return their smiles as these produce ripples of happiness in my own heart. Oh, the joy of seeing others enjoy!

Here is Prof. C. of Edinburgh university, a venerable gentleman of experience, with his wife and two children who, like Lucy Gray of Wordsworth, trip along as they walk. Little impish smiles radiate through the common room, a common room and kitchen in one, as Gwen recites

’Tis merry ’t is merry in the fairyland
Where fairy birds are singing etc. .

and finds her brother David, a Goliath for a young boy, sitting alone unnoticed. The sister has scored over her learned elder brother who cannot find a patient listener to his stories of Mary, Queen of the Scots. For here is a barn nearby and on the bank, as Gwen assures us, fairies once used to hold their

revels which she, herself one of those fairies no doubt, is going to describe.

A man of ideas, this professor of medicine in Edinburgh. On his part he reveals a page of his youth when hiking was not a rage and when he was condemned for spending the honeymoon hiking. These youth hostels were not then in existence and the Highlands were, as they still to some extent are, more or less a game preserve for English peers, American millionaires and Indian maharajahs. They come as paying guests but not trespassers into the domain of natural beauty. The landlords do not encourage the few farmers that are to take paying guests for the night and the hotels are expensive. These far-away lonely tracts have been opened to the access of people like me only in the second quarter of this century.

The Briton loves his country. He has discovered every far-away corner of his land, beautified it and made it adorable not only to himself but also to the world at large. Aesthetic sense is innate in him and he grows up in beauty. Like Wordsworth's sweetheart his country "walks in beauty." He can never allow a thing of beauty to be despoiled of it. In this land of youth he is not content with covering his country by car or train. He wants to acquaint himself with it bit by bit on foot. And there are many national organisations for this purpose.

Indeed this joy is meant for everybody and not only for the God's elect. Even the man of small means, whose holiday is limited to fifteen summer days in the year, can afford to go out for a holiday. What if he cannot afford staying in a hotel or riding a car? What if Paris and Vienna are beyond his humble reach? The open spaces and hills, the moors and forests of his own country are there for him. The national organisations have not forgotten him.

Back to the common room in the youth hostel, I meet people of so many types and tastes. There is no caste here, no risk of pedantry, no offensive look of money. We start exchanging our experiences, reminiscences of the past, amusing incidents of the day. We had never met one another before, nor do we know one another's views or temperament. But we have all tried to soften our individual angularities so that they do not hurt others. Herein you come in contact with the genuine social politeness of the European. I would any day

prefer this sincerity of social art to what passes in India as love of truthfulness which in unsophisticated parlance is termed criticism or even frontal attack.

Life in Europe is always on the move. Nobody knows any body but any one can be a friend in need. Where there are no friends everybody can be a friend. The reticence and reserve of city life have been thrown to the four winds. We were strangers to one another and to-morrow shall be so again. But to-day we share our joys and experiences like good friends. And the company is unlimited and without any liability. Who knew that this bespectacled intelligent face full of smiles and jokes belongs to a banker? Who knew Bill till in him was discovered a storehouse of songs and stories? A youth of delicate appearance, ready to serve you his potatoes and pet stories when they are needed most, how could we know him to be a dour solicitor in a city noted for its legal acumen? In one corner sit two Scotch youths, fast friends indeed, as they are not of the same profession. They demand an Indian song. Instead we sing in chorus:

My bonnie is over the ocean,
My bonnie is over the sea;
Bring back, oh, bring back
Bring back my bonnie to me.

Somebody whispers that I am probably responsible for this sad situation. Someone does not want a familiar song. So they have an Indian song, a love song of Tagore which hardly suits the singer or the surroundings.

"Ah, then, you Indians too, can love?"

"Can't we? Ask your bonnie lassies. They know better."

I feel an appreciative tap on the shoulder and a roar of laughter greets the enlightened enquirer.

It is about half-past nine now and in another half an hour we must retire. In come three girls from Dundee with their bright new kilts and merry laughs which must be explained. One of them starts dancing on her toes and sings out that they have found eggs for the morrow. But how could that be possible? We had scoured all the nearby villages for eggs and found nothing.

"Yes, that may be so, but we have bought in advance those likely to be hatched on the morrow."

Clever people, no doubt. That is how they rule the city of London.

I start enquiring about the kilt I would buy in the next town. Ah, those bright tartans! But not the Macdonald one which, recalling a famous Prime Minister, may have a political colour. Father Wisdom in our professor asks me not to buy one, kilt being an unfailing proof of one's foreign origin. Fancy! In the Highlands and not in a kilt. Oh, Romance, where are thy apparels?

Scotland believes in personalities and believes in trading in their names. Anywhere you may go in the borderland, anywhere not beyond the range of char—a—baucs and you are sure to find almost every church and cottage and muddy lane associated with Scott. Round about Edinburgh Mary, Queen of the Scots, reigns unchallenged and will continue to do so so long as Scotland lives. As my path grows narrower and more winding it opens out new vistas magnificent in their stretch and smile. Here I feel the pervasive personality of the Highland clans all put together and the memories of the individual clans seem to press heavy over the calm blue so peculiar to this mountainous country. Many a dark tale is associated with this part of the world, for it was not always the deer and the game bird that men hunted over the purple heather stretches and densely wooded slopes. The Highlands I see now are already getting domesticated and along with the spurt of the deer, the whirl of the grouse and the bleat of the sheep occasional motor horns break the primeval silence.

At the same time over all the onslaughts of time prevails the Highlands' association with Bonnie Prince Charlie, their generous chivalry for a lost cause. He stands in the centre of an age of gallantry and oppression. Even now the rugged rustic's imagination flies with the beaten hunted prince with a price on his head as the old boatman sings out in the midst of storms over the lochs:

Royal Charlie's now away
Safely o'er the friendly main;
Many a heart will break in twa,
Will he na' come back again?

Fires go up on all the hilltops, horns echo and re-echo, a handsome young prince gallops away and a gallant girl steadies her

frail boat on the dark stormy waters. As the evening clouds gather over the lakes and shadows lengthen at the foot of the hills Bonnie Prince Charlie begins to disappear by the deep forests along with the refrain of that old song.

In the country of Burns his love poems come direct from the heart of the singers. Lovers purchase small memorial volumes bound in tartans and dedicate them to the beloved with quotations from within. The face of the queen of hearts must be as beautiful as that of the Queen of the Scots. Have no doubt about that. The guides in Holyrood palace would point out the bedroom of the queen so tenderly and describe the murder of Rizzio so gently that they must have been his friends of yesterday. Perhaps the echoes of the fleeing queen on horseback are still resounding in the Salisbury Crags.

Meanwhile a new personality has appeared in this romantic region and is firing its imagination. Amidst the loneliness of great hills and the solitude that lies like a lullaby over the luxuriant woods and glistening lakes word has passed round the countryside regarding the movements and achievements of an Indian student. Nothing perhaps stirred them so much since the 'Forty-five. One day the sun was beating down mercilessly and every step on the flinty rabbit run was a misery with no prospect of an end to it. To lighten the burden I gave a command performance of an Indian marching song something like

Allons. Allons. Toujours allons.

But was I singing in a B.B.C. studio or did a friendly spy ambush my song with his portable wireless transmitter? In every hostel I visited I found the refrain of my marching song repeated with reverence. Or was it half-amused curiosity? I had no doubt it was full of meaning anyway.

My birth anniversary greeted me one of these days and how could I celebrate it? Somehow I collected some rice but lentils were rare. A trek of twenty-two miles in all enabled me to procure broken peas from a little known port where supplies are brought by the steamer once a week. The worthy shop of Maerea was the local post office, grocery and cobblery all combined. And the fare cooked by me surpassed all my other adventures. It got a little burnt and quietly I went out of the Youth Hostel to deposit the burnt portion in a thicket. None were nosey, but noses could not be denied. The smell

spread far and wide much ahead of me and as we were climbing the day after the next some twenty-five miles away two hikers, companions on the way, were found in possession of the latest news hit of the land.

Another day we felt tired after a whole day's climb and searched out a small hill stream to sit by and prepare a late regal lunch of bread and butter and boiled potatoes when a shining intelligent face peeped out of the bush nearby and asked, "Are you the Indian?" I like such questions. There is curiosity in them but no offence, a tinge of welcome but no shadow of suspicion. This is of course in the Highlands where English is spoken. But everywhere in Europe this welcome hospitality is evident. Where speech has stopped for the lack of language mind has had no difficulty in making an advance. Where sound has stopped silence has proffered help in the language of the eyes and movements.

My destination is unknown but I am not a stranger wherever I may go. Sympathy and understanding succeed where other things have failed. And failure is not my lot.

STEPPING WESTWARD

It is queer but it does happen that one or two strains of music so completely possess a growing mind that their influence can hardly ever be shaken off. It comes on unnoticed and begins to grow till it pervades the whole existence.

Such a strain of a song of the poet Tagore cast its long and unending spell over the whole of my busy student life bristling with examinations.

With that spell has mixed up deeply the spell of the formidable Cuillins this fine evening.

“Oh, I am restless

I thirst for the far away”

Not only my mind or feet, but the clouds and mist are also restless, chasing each other on the top of the big mountain range. They are playing hide and seek, forgetful of their journey's end. But, unlike me, they are not athirst for the far-away. If they were, I would not have been so restless now.

We three, formerly unknown to one another, are keeping our watchful eyes wistfully glued to the mountain-top. Just like Robert Bruce in front of the Stirling castle. For two successive days endless clouds and rains have continued to jeer at our ambition. We came to the Isle of Skye from the western Scotland and we found in the island a beautiful ‘purdah’ lady.

Yes, Skye is always in ‘purdah’, always behind a veil of fog. It requires a good deal of waiting and persuasion to have a good look at her through the veil.

People in the West would not understand the tender romance of this long waiting and supplication. Your heart's desire is not a flower in full bloom in your front garden, open to all gazes. She is behind a veil of shyness, half in bloom and awaiting the warmth of love for full flowering. Till then, however, none rules out stealing a glance at her or catching up a chancey smile. Love is not love but is quickened by the desire to conquer difficulties and distances.

No greater distance is there than that of the veil. It keeps the desired face near and yet so far. And no greater difficulty exists than that of drawing the veil aside. No wonder, Humayun, the Moghul emperor of Delhi, wrote to his bride Jubedi in Persian

A boggar beseeches, darling,
 Have compassion on me:
 Your veil comes down curling,
 Invisible remaineth thee.
 Joy and hunger in between
 Why such distance keep?
 This meaningless veil, O queen,
 Which makes my heart so weep?
 Shrouding beauty 'hind the screen
 The veil's a weapon, dear,
 I supplicate, you win,
 Heart o' my heart, come near.

I am now like Humayun, patiently waiting with bended knees for just a glance at the Cuillins through the veil of clouds. I must find the weak spot in her defences and then conquer my sweetheart. Such is the strategy everywhere. Alike in love and war.

The Cuillins represent the queen of mountains in the British Isles. No other range keeps its head aloft in such glory in this part of the world.

Since the afternoon no fresh showers have come down to wash away our chances. That was our only hope. We started completing the arrangements and packing up the rucksacks. In them were a few tins of beans and salmon. Also a length of sturdy rope.

Why rope? Far away in my country some elderly people would get shocked and ask, "Why rope?"

No, not for tying round my own neck, but for tying up the neck of the cliff and then tying ourselves by the waist, if ordinary methods failed.

I could imagine how in my ancient village a shiver would pass down the spines of unsophisticated elders sitting round the evening fire. Their adventures were not of this type. Nor did they care to know what madness Europe indulges in in the name of adventures. But here the spine of the Cuillins seemed always defiant and so were our spines at that exciting sight.

I know some affectionate old rustic lady preparing her evening meals and enjoying the warmth of the kitchen would mutter the name of God and ask, "Why go to encounter such dangers?" Rope-climbing may be like riding the surfs. You

never know what happens. Whether you go up or go under depends on magic.

Bill gave expression to this idea of magic. He said, "We hear magicians of your country know rope-walking well. So you don't have to worry."

That is exactly my worry, thought I. They were thinking that I had magic in my feet.

But they did not know that I had not even seen the magic of Bhānumati, the traditional woman magician of India. Everybody of the older generation seems to have seen her at work but we unfortunate unbelievers of this generation could never set our eyes on her or her tribe.

Of course I realised that here in this magic isle I was a better magician than the great Bhānumati herself. What greater effect could she produce than what I have done here in my unprofessional way? Village after village has rushed out just to have a look at me, to talk to me and to test my knowledge of palmistry. A school declared a holiday just to listen to my accounts of a country unknown to them. Neither a mendicant nor a maharaja, what sort of a man was this who claimed to have come from distant India?

My reply to Bill was overdue. I put in a counter question. "If I know rope-walking why need I try rope climbing at all?"

But Jim was not to be denied. A brilliant idea flashed on him. "Then why don't you use the magic carpet?"

I burst into laughter and replied, "Jim, if there is a magic carpet anywhere it is spread over this very earth of ours. It does not fly in the sky. If we find a green stretch of land on the top of the hill to-morrow that will be our magic carpet of Persia".

Bill nodded and came down to the earth. "Right you are. We don't want a more precious carpet."

Before the break of dawn we started on our new adventure. A real adventure for a young man who had spent all his time in the Gangetic plains of India. A still greater adventure for these two young Britons who will spend all their precious youth hearing the chimes of the Bow Bells and will probably never see a foreign country.

While working in the field, Wordsworth's Solitary Reaper found in her heart the echoes of the far-off Hebrides with all

their songs unsung, pangs unexpressed and desolation unredeemed. The call of that unheard-of life has mixed up with the rumbling of the Atlantic and brought me to this lonely isle. Fumbling my way through mist I felt that this garden island must have been created by some magician of the Arabian Nights. She had lured me here with the magic of her flute and then retired with all its inhabitants into primeval concealment leaving it to me and me alone. Was it one of those one thousand and one Arabian Nights which now appeared in a pall of mist?

Yes, a magic island no doubt. The mysterious shadow of the misty Skye threw a spell over me as deep as that thrown on the Arabian prince by his would-be victim of the morrow. She would therefore go on telling a tale which never had any end. Nor could its enchantment end either. The story of the Skye is like that saga of Arabia, a charm without conclusion. I was under a hallucination.

The glen of Sligachan lay dark and dreadful against the Cuillins, the most difficult of the British mountain-ranges to climb. We spent the early hours of the morning on the desolate shores of the Atlantic. All the time the feeling that a neolithic tomb and a canal of the Vikings are somewhere nearby gave a sharp edge to our adventure. Naturally the Cuillins fascinated us more as we started climbing up the jagged shoulders. I also felt that by the evening when the shadows would lengthen, the beetles whine amid the peat reek and even the occasional isolated cairns get scareer I would again have a sensation that the Cuillins are something that can be seen, touched and even conquered but not understood. This Gaelic world is not ours.

“From over the sea to Skye”

we go as casual travellers and such we shall be, however long we may remain there.

While climbing I began to apprehend that my heartbeats have started an irregular movement like an ancient motor engine. I cast a wistful look back at the glen and what came to my mind but the battle centuries ago in which one clan got completely exterminated? But was that a proper thought for me when the ceiling of clouds was pressing round my head and a wall of mist behind my back? With a queer feeling I snatched another glance below my level. It was difficult to

imagine that beyond this curtain there was a green and smiling land. There nobody gives any thought to the hide and seek of the clouds and the sun, the showers and the barrenness of the Cuillins. Further beyond the wayfarer by the side of Ben Nevis, while listening to the music of the rivulet nearby, hardly imagines that on this side of the Atlantic in a strange place like this Nature indulges in a different sort of sport in this unconcerned fashion. I felt desolate and forlorn.

Frequently I remember Nandalāl, a character in one of the celebrated comic poems of D. L. Roy, a famous Indian writer. Nandalāl never took risks, never had any adventure. He just carefully preserved his sheltered life till the end. And for what great cause? Just for the sake of his country and nothing else! To him selfpreservation itself was service to the country. He could have easily laid down his life but, then, what would happen to his helpless country? Brought up in his mother's tender care, massaging his soft body with oil and water, why should he of all persons in the world risk his life in mountaineering? But the call of Europe has that urge in it which could bring out this ancient Nandalāl also into the wide, wide world and set him out in quest of the unknown.

Can anybody doubt this influence of Europe on India? From the renaissance of culture to the nascency of nationalism the impress of Europe and of England in particular has left its undeniable stamp everywhere on everything in India.

I can never agree that while out in the West we should only go on cramming text books and do nothing else. No diversions, no casting-off of old fetters. In Sanskrit there is a proverbial dig against the man whose horizon is limited like that of the frog in the well. Must we, while out of that well and flying in the blue sky, confine ourselves to the collection of straw for feathering the nest only? Must we rest content with gathering only that knowledge that helps solve the bread problem? Should we come back without testing the infinite expanse of the soft blue sky around us? The Cuillins under our feet may be dangerous to the uninitiated. Nevertheless people do climb up and never mind the risk involved.

Actually this is what happened to us. Bill proposed to make use of the rope and it was left to me to disagree. I could not accept failure with all the premium of youth on me. I told him that out in India constables put a rope round the thief's

waist and take him to the magistrate. I could not present myself before the Cuillins and ask for reprieve or penalty, whichever you prefer, with a rope round my waist. It was not a great adventure any way. Nor anything to write home about. But the simile did put heart into my friends.

I remember yet another episode of courage and cheer which lifted us above the fear of death. There is a fairy island in Loch Marce. While returning from there we were caught in a severe storm and the frail boat was about to turn turtle. But we did not get ready to drown ourselves like helpless stones in stormy waters. Instead we mustered courage by reciting Campbell's "Lord Ullin's Daughter." When that was not enough we started singing lustily in chorus. Gradually it dawned on me how Europe, steeped in its alleged materialism, has quietly conquered infirmity and defies death.

In India we say that Europe does not possess the spiritual wealth which we have. May be. But then they live in the midst of so much more joy than we do. Our scriptures say that joy is heaven, is the source of all creation. Why do we forget that lesson? After all life has its final end in death though the spirit lives on. Why then should we not enjoy life to the full?

A religious mendicant may have a very good life. He may have escaped the miseries of the world also. But has he gone through the fullness of life? If he has not tasted all its fruits how can he have the good fortune of experiencing the mighty luxury of grief? In Indian villages we often see the spectacle of the idle villager brushing aside the moss on the surface of the pond and having a hurried dip called bath before the moss gathers again. If a sanyasi takes life in this selective fashion where is the nobility in his renunciation? Truly has the world-poet Tagore sung

"Deliverance is not for me in renunciation."

We seem to have lost the great qualities of courage, self-abnegation and self-reliance. So we cannot easily make light of fear and misery. We have retained only tears, weak and meek tears. We in India look at life through the spectacles of helplessness.

As it is, Europe spontaneously hankers for the distant and the unknown. On the top of that when the inner self receives a call from the outward Nature an infinite joy of creation

inspires the mind, a joy that defies all description. One day I was coming down after a day-long battle with a difficult cliff. The pleasure of conquest was very soothing indeed and the prospect of a simple restful evening in the Youth Hostel far away was tantalising when came in sight two girls by the side of a barn that croons away to itself in a familiar undertone. Streaks of the setting sun burst through cloud-banks and gleamed on their golden hair; in their beautiful blue eyes was reflected the blue of the sky which lay behind those clouds and they were sitting there with smiles on their lips, symbols of the soul of the Hebrides. Unconsciously I murmured, "Oh you Videshini".

What poetic imagination and what effusion of the heart have centred round the fair stranger? She is the princess in whose search the prince of the legend crosses the seven seas on his stallion. She is the one whose glimpses the poet gets in the ceaseless happy murmur of the tress, in the playfulness of the fleecy clouds, in the bluish haze of the primeval forests. But she remains beyond our reach and quest for ever and ever. She is just a phantom of delight. You can feel her but neither touch nor see her. Sweet because so secret, the poet sings for her because of her very silence. The whole universe tries to unravel her mysteries but she remains behind the veil. Perhaps she does not belong to this world of ours. She is la charmante exotique.

* * * *

A bright warm day. I was roaming in the English lake districts without any thought of the mad days in the Hebrides. Those days of hallucination in Skye have long been left behind, it seems. I myself would not now approve of the madness of spending the whole day in search of a Viking tomb in thick undergrowths of bracken. There the people seemed to believe that in each lake and hill and cave some spirit reigns supreme in his unbroken solitude. Every place had its own of ghosts with the copy-right lying with his family. But those romantic elements are lacking in the domain of Wordsworth. Here there is only one spirit, that of the finest little girl that ever lived in this earth of ours, Lucy Grey. Very few people saw her in this world. But the way the poet saw her she has become immortal to us. Any old village woman could vouch-

safe that though eluding our grasp she goes on tripping in light fantastic toes over the hill in stormy nights and under the starry sky.

It is not that herein lies the only difference between the Scottish and the English lakes. But the main point of difference can be understood therefrom. In the northern lakes Nature's beauty is stern and wild; here it is soft and sophisticated. There I found the ecstasies of primeval life, here the expression of cultured taste. There reigns tumult and here satisfaction.

This difference is also illustrated in the open country-side round the Youth Hostels of the two different regions.

"The joy of widest commonalty spread" which Wordsworth found in Keswick has become somewhat sophisticated with human touch. Men went North in response to the urge for the unknown and Nature wiped off his foot prints with her own hand and withdrew herself in her own majesty.

There are many people of the richer classes among the visitors to the English lakes but we wayfarers do not count them among us. We like to hike across lonely rural tracts where solitude is not broken by the sound of motor horns and to climb hills which are forbidding to the unaccustomed feet. These are the elements which break the peace of Wordsworth's country and despoil the sacredness of solitude. The fleet of automobiles and the list of eatables in wayside hotels certainly show scant respect to the spirit of the poet and are out of harmony with the playfulness of the swan on the bosom of the Grasmere lake. The motorists do not feel that the cuckoo is,

"No Bird but an invisible thing, a Voice, a mystery".
Nor do they feel that the earth is,

"An unsubstantial facry place".

With this consolation and five shillings only for my daily budget I get into the lake to have a swim. They stand on its banks and watch or purchase a ticket for a ride in a motor launch. Perhaps some day I shall have the good fortune of seeing the portals of my heart open at the majestic call of Nature in the sudden silver shock of the Windermere in the still starry silence of the night just like the young boy of the poet who felt the great presence by the side of that lake while stopping suddenly mimic calls to the owl. Therefore, I have not returned

from the poet's house like those motorists with a costly volume of Wordsworth bulging out of my pocket. The supreme moment is rare in a man's life and comes, when it does come, very unexpectedly,

"Flash upon the inward eye
Which is the bliss of solitude."

For that I shall keep myself always in readiness.

Of all the days spent in hiking and climbing in Wordsworth's country, one was the most fortunate. I was trying to climb my way up the Helvellyn and then down to a place which will take me to the Grasmere Youth Hostel. There was no recognised route up the hill nor any guide except the stones or rubble displaced by some previous climbers. It was nearly afternoon when I managed to reach the top of the hill. The top of the world it seemed to me and the bottom of my determination.

With regrets I remembered the little episode in Wordsworth's house that morning. The house where the poet of Nature lived needs no description. I went there a votary but felt like being crowded out by sophisticated Americans who were purchasing expensive memorial volumes. I stealthily went to the hot house in the garden which proudly gives notice that there the poet used to write and that no body should pluck apples. But I wanted to.

Only one small apple would do for me. Who knew while munching it I might strike a poetic note which would make me famous? Any how it might kindle the fire of poetry in me. So I plucked one forbidden fruit unobserved.

But the Americans were not to be denied. They intruded upon my solitude. Poetic apples and prossic Americans do not however go well together. Nor do a genuine hiker in the lake districts and a band of motoring tourists. Their offer of a free ride to the Grasmere hostel I had refused with thanks in the morning and now I had only my stars to thank for the plight I was in.

The Poet, however, came to my rescue. Tired in body and soul, I sat down, remembered the apple of his garden and ate it slowly. Peace was established with this unfriendly world and a little later I began to mutter his poem "Stepping Westward".

"Would be a wildish destiny,
 If we, who thus together roam
 In a strange Land, and far from home,
 Were in this place the guests of Chance;
 Yet who would stop, or fear to advance,
 Though home or shelter he had none,
 With such a sky to lead him on?"

Fortified with this thought I felt I had gathered the strength

"Of travelling through the world that lay
 Before me in my endless way".

In my case my fate was linked up with the West and that way I must proceed. And what a splendid sight I saw? The whole western horizon was lit up with the sunset glory and it was reflecting in the waters of the Grasmere right below the hills. Fire, liquid fire was burning on the lake through the reeds near the edge of the water and creating a golden phantasy. All the toil of the day was more than compensated for. Such a heavenly sight could be seen only from a height. Heaven only knows the beauty of this earth of ours.

And Wordsworth's poems verily lift us to the level of heaven.

That night the Youth Hostel of Grasmere was en fete. A band of German tourists had come and they were very good at music and other fine arts. We had a festival of songs in many languages and many instruments including the Indian flute were played. At night we had our usual frugal meal of boiled potatoes, eggs and bread and the lights were off at 10 p.m. But an hour later we woke up at the sound of a Spanish Guitar from under the staircase. Tired and full of sleep I tried to dismiss the guitar as a continuation in dream of the evening's music but my German friends were more practical and got up in search of the guitar. On it was being played a famous Italian song—Solo para te, Lucia. (Lucia, for you alone). That song kept the hostel spellbound. According to rules nobody is allowed to come out of the dormitory after 11 p.m. but one after another all of us stole out into the night. To crown all we found the huge expressionless warden himself coming out not to reprove us for breaking the rule but to join in our silent appreciation. On his face played a gleam of joy, an ecstasy of happiness. That Italian song seemed to be

revealing to us the secrets of the starry night, "the light that never was on sea or land".

Next day I again climbed the Helvellyn, the highest of the peaks in Wordsworth's country. The landscape made me forget all the toils of the climbing. The gentle hand of Nature wiped away all traces of fatigue and discontent. The melody of the last night's guitar began to break into my silence and whisper to me how Europe forgets her tears and keeps on smiling, how she loves this life, this world made sacred by our tears and love and liberty. I began to love this cheerful exuberant life of Europe which moves away misery and defies death. I love this life. Solo para te, O Europa.

AN EVENING OF PALMISTRY

Palmistry is neither a pastime nor a profession with me.

Still I had to read palms once. Not that I wanted to. But requests make one go a long way and should I refuse even to hold hands' Luck was with me and I could go through the ordeal without being found out. My limitations might have been discovered in the act of reading the palm of a gipsy but it was his past instead of my art that was discovered. Fate is supposed to be written on the lines of one's palms. I do not know whether this is really true or not. But Europe knows that every Indian is more or less an expert in reading the writing on the palm,—not on the wall of course!

I was concocting many a story regarding the past and the future but was not prepared for the heart-rending story I came across in course of this innocent sport. I was weaving yarns just on the basis of a smattering of the subject when I stumbled on Rudy's past. In a game of lies I took a random shot at the bull's eye of truth.

This happened in the Hebrides where the only Indian who had, according to reports available, preceded me was a hawker of silk. I too was a hawker in a way. I hawked round my mind in search of beauties unknown and did lose it in the sombre solitude of the place. I was a wayfarer off the beaten track.

It was a wandering life of wonders, never anticipated in my quiet, uneventful life as a student in India. I reached the Youth Hostel at Wig after a weary hike of twenty miles. It was a pretty little bungalow with a stage-like balcony in the common room, which excited my curiosity. And my sense of humour too. The balcony was rather romantic and a hiker was standing there in kilt.

"Who is he?" somebody whispered to me.

"Oh, just a summary of the history of the Highlands" replied I, in a low, but fairly audible voice.

A loud laughter greeted me and a voice rang out that he had come over to the Hebrides to take part in the annual Highlands games at Portwee.

I went across to him and shook his hands warmly. "Well done, friend. You must be the champion this year. Our best wishes for you".

He felt somewhat embarrassed and gently asked, "What do you mean, George?"

I smiled and replied, "Your ancestors must have fought with Bruce and fled with the young Pretender. I have read your past and forecast your future. You know, I am from India."

That was enough for all the boarders. Right away I became a hero, an object of careful curiosity, of rare reverence. I could feel that from the stolen glances at me, like those of a shy maiden in her first love.

I finished my regal dinner of boiled potatoes, eggs, bread and butter and thanked my religious ancestors for having invented the very useful institution of "ekādashi" i.e. fast or *frugal fare on the eleventh day after the full moon or the new moon*. That gave me a moral support and physical sustenance in moments of revolt against this hiking life. The plain living of those days I took as certainly productive of high thinking. What was this but an instance of high thinking when I attributed the limit of three nights' stay in a Youth Hostel as the Briton's acceptance of the Hindu orthodox custom of not spending more than three nights under a roof other than one's own? Deep thoughts like these often supplied the necessary salt to this life of solitary hiking.

Only one thing was lacking. And that was the hubble bubble. Right back in my country a villager would walk twenty miles of necessity and not for pleasure and then turn to this great treasure of his life. The choicest cigar is supposed to be flat in comparison with this traditional Indian smoke. When the Britisher was just building his empire in India and the withdrawal into his insularity away from Indian life had not started this long fluted tobacco pipe was his great pleasure. That was his evening tea to be enjoyed and offered to guests. With each pull at the pipe smoke would be drawn through water. The bubbling rumble of each puff will be the solace of his lonely hours, the balm of his daily cares.

I never smoked a hubble bubble in my life except once. And that too on the sly and avoiding the watchful eyes of well-wishers. But now I felt a strong urge for this smoke rich with tradition. The Great Moghuls enjoyed this smoke. Why should n't I?

But who would reply? These young hikers who have

never enjoyed this smoke? Poor boys and girls. They do not know what they are missing. The very thought of this princely smoke was soothing and soporific.

The giant of the Arabian Nights took shape through a cloud of smoke. The very thought of smoke gave shape to a vision. A vision of the hubble bubble. I might not procure an actual one in this lonely isle unblest with the footsteps of my countrymen. But none prevents me from having a sort of vicarious enjoyment of the same. I joined a few cigarettes together, put in sufficient tobacco and joined them into a fattish long cigarette. Then I clasped it like the flue of the pipe and started having pulls at it the same way one does the hubble bubble. My mind was its own master. The taste of the regal smoke was there and in deep delight my head swayed from right to left and left to right. I closed my eyes in sheer relaxation. Ah, sweet reverie.

No. Please do not run away with the thought that I had a Brahminical tuft of hair on the head swinging like a pendulum in rhythm with the movement of the pride of my mortal frame. But the young Britons surely thought I was in a trance. They were observing me with interest all round and yet pretending not to. As I came down from the heaven of smoke a gentle upward movement of my eyes unfolded to me the pictures of attention and curiosity that they were. They felt shy and embarrassed.

Initiated into the art of open air theatres in Indian villages I was conversant with the many poses an actor would adopt in such a situation. I knew how to overwhelm these uninitiated innocents by slowly lifting one eye brow and opening only one eye. I produced that pose and lightly advanced the right hand like a deity appearing on the scene to reward the devotee. Then both the eyes were opened with an ethereal aspect and the other eye brow also raised. The effect was smashing.

The only flaw was that the devotees did not fall at my feet full length asking for heavenly boons.

Instead came forward a girl with her hand outstretched in a most disrespectful way. "Excuse me. Would you please read my palm, if you don't mind".

This was more than what I had bargained for. All I had planned was to show them a few innocent poses and cheer up

the evening. But I had no desire to pose as a palmist. Nor would I ever like to do so. My knowledge was limited to a few handbooks of Cheiro which form part of everybody's equipment. They add to the subjects of general conversation in society but cannot entitle you to be a master palmist. Very politely I begged to be excused.

Requested again I told them frankly that I knew nothing of this art.

The girl-hiker pouted her lips in a very handsome manner and put all the honey in her words, "No? You don't know? We all know Indians to be experts in things supernatural. All Indians can play with snakes and read palms."

A smile softened my displeasure. Smilingly I replied, "That's all your imagination. We have both palmists and snake charmers but not too many of them. Nor do I belong to either of the classes. I am just an ordinary student, an ordinary mortal like you. But I am not an American tourist and I like to tramp in unknown places. Again, just like you."

My apologies were dismissed. Everybody sided with her and pressed me to read their future. A blue-eyed blonde in kilt tried to be more intimate and addressed me very affectionately as George.

Her imploring voice was irresistible. She said, "George, do please agree. A storm is brewing outside. Nymphs are rising from the bay nearby and ghosts coming from the hills. There is plenty of inspiration within. We are feeling sleepy too. Whatever you say must be true. Come, give us some good news and we shall go to sleep happy. Come, come, be a sport, George dear".

Wars have been declared for less than this. Sweet entreaties are hard to resist. I of course appreciated what they were wanting. Some forecasts after their heart would be quite enough for them. If these bring them sweet dreams why should I not agree? If there is any sin in lying, let that sin be mine and the happiness theirs.

That hanging stage-like balcony was the ideal dais for my august adventure. With a great flourish and a lot of preliminaries I climbed up. Half-forgotten Sanskrit chants were duly recited and priestly mannerisms exhibited. Then I closed my eyes for a while and started chanting some impressive Vedic stanzas. Silence followed. All to create the right atmosphere.

Slowly I opened my eyes and in a deep voice called out the girl named Mary who was in that crowd.

What a surprise and what an appreciative chuckle. After all George must be knowing magic. How else could he know of Mary? She arrived here after the evening and George has not yet met her. Nor did anybody else know that Miss Dawson was Mary.

Mary came forward with joy and expectations. She was excited when I looked at her intently and asked her to put me three questions. Only three.

Mary probably was confident of her intelligence. She smartly asked me to give out the question which she wanted to put to me.

My eyes closed again while I scrutinised her appearance and voice. I checked up her fingers as well. Then I lifted her left palm and replied, "You want to know whether you would be happy."

Poor Mary. She was beside herself and did not know what to ask next. She had no time to think either. Out came her second question, "All right. Tell me the name of the man with whom I shall be happy."

While she felt inspired I was about to perspire. How could I tell the name? In any case this was not palmistry. Desperately I closed my eyes again and tried to think hard. I sent searching glances at her hand bag also. But no indication was forthcoming. At my wit's end I said, "the name must be Bob, John or George."

Mary was wild with delight. "Oh, you are a real guy. You are wonderful. Many people of course know the name of Robert S. John but even my mother does not know it. Well, well, here is my last question. Has he not yet started loving me?"

It had been easy to hit upon the name, Mary. Every third girl bears this name and I was confident that some Mary must be there in that group. The man who styles himself as Robert S. John must be a sophisticated creature of some money and education and here was Mary, evidently a cockney, trying to improve herself.

Without any hesitation I replied, "He is still a little undecided in his mind but that would pass off as you become more and more modern. You know what I mean."

The word modern was deliberately used. It would mean a world of things. Let Mary make her own interpretation.

Clapping her hands in joy she climbed down the balcony. A wave of delight was reflected in her springy footsteps. I too became happy at her happiness.

Not a very difficult art this performance as a palmist so long as you do not get involved in your readings. All the men and women there were young; naturally their field of questions also was small. All the girls came back to the same question. Would they be happy? Would they get love, creature comforts, a home?

It was surprising that girls much more than men were keen on happiness.

One of them asked me, "I am very happy. But please tell me how is that?"

The soft and elegant palm of her hand betrayed her. I replied with confidence, "A man has come down from heaven in the shape of your husband. He does not let you work and does most of it himself. You have been spared domestic drudgery."

As none of the hikers present that night are likely to read this confession I might as well give out the secret. Such delicate palm and fingers can belong to only those lucky creatures who do not have to do their household work even in a country like Britain where labour-saving devices are many. This girl had taken off the ring from her finger before producing the palm but how could she remove the impress?

Most of the boys asked about the means of livelihood. I told a number of them that they would do better if they went abroad to the colonies. It is very easy to tell this to young men of this country. Some asked whether anybody has fallen in love with him. The reply was very easy. Whether you know it or not some girl is already in love with you. It was as sure as anything that even if the forecast were incorrect no young man with self-respect dare, while in company, deny my gratifying statement.

In fine I was carrying on my art successfully like a master. But who knew that my fame would spread out so far like the heavy perfume of our Indian Champaka flower in spring time and attract outsiders? My demonstration of palmistry was nearly at an end and I was about to close up the counter when

somebody rapped impatiently at the front door of the hostel and came in without waiting for permission. A strange looking man in a haughty gait with questions in his eyes.

"(Oh, that gipsy" some one whispered. "His caravan came here only this morning. What a nuisance."

The Romany came forward with firm footsteps. A stout well-built man. Not as fair as an Englishman though. His butterfly moustache seemed to aim at an actual flight from his lip. His earlobes were pierced with rings and head covered with a turbanlike cloth. A silk scarf in place of the tie and a velvet vest over the shirt completed the ensemble of this dandy. There was no mistaking this European gipsy. A master of many crafts, he was not like the illiterate gipsies found in India.

I was feeling a little tired. Weary and wind-blown the whole day, I was almost drowsy. After all there is a limit up to which Indian bones can stand. It was well past ten and others also were tempted by the lure of bed. Actually I would have retired much earlier but for the gauntlet I had taken up as an Indian supposed to be well versed in palmistry.

Very firmly the new-comer requested me, "Sir, the whole village here is excited over your great abilities. They say that since the days of Fingal no such palmist has visited this side of the Atlantic. Please be kind enough to read my hand."

I was not to be taken in by such compliments. Gipsies as a rule are good at palmistry and I was not the man to allow the reputation built up and preserved this evening to be marred by him.

"There's a limit to endurance. Both my mind and eyes are tired. Please excuse me for the night."

I knew that the morrow would not find me there. The sun and myself would rise on the hill top at the same time. The open road will call me with the call of the lark. The gipsy and my final trial as a palmist will both be left behind.

But he too was not the man to give in. He entreated me again, "Have pity on me, sir. Only one question. Only one."

With sleep heavy on their eyes all the hikers supported his request. "George, only one question. Poor chap has come a long way and where will he get a man like you? Be a sport."

What to do in the circumstances? In this game of fate

reading, God alone knows what was the game fate would play with me. I had to be a sport.

In a deep rumbling voice the gipsy asked me, "Why did my marriage fall through?"

In addition he protruded his hand menacingly. As if he would pull out my entrails with his powerful fingers if I failed to answer.

I had to take shelter behind Cheiro. Unfortunately poses or cleverness would not help in answering this question. But Cheiro also did not come to my rescue. The greater embarrassment was that these people had started placing me even above that great palmist himself. Not only that. They were now watching the battle between representatives of two races, both associated in the European mind with the art of palmistry.

At best of times it is difficult to read a hand in front of so many curious eyes. I could only read that the line connecting the houses of Moon and Fate was broken and a line from Mars intersected that line sharply. But what to conclude from these?

Oh, my teacher Cheiro! If you do have a magic wand please make the lines of this gipsy's palm clearer and interpret them for me. Have the Delphic oracles stopped for all times?

Suddenly I shouted out, "Your marriage fell through because it would have involved blood-shed."

Did lightning strike the room? Girls with weak nerves nearly had fits. Their pale lips emitted interjections like 'oh my' 'oh goodness' and what not. Anxiety and apprehension were writ large on all faces. A young dilettante just whispered, "My hat".

But the Romany caught my hand in a firm grip. He bit his lower lip hard to suppress his excitement and demanded "How could you know that, George?"

I realised what a master stroke I had brought out. I was about to whistle in joy but cut short the demonstration to say, "You had only one question to ask".

Everybody agreed and started bidding good night. Many hurriedly retired to the dormitory showering thanks and congratulations on me. Mary whispered in my ears that she would send me her photograph with her fiance. I must join her marriage ceremony.

But the Romany would not let me off so easily. He almost wept, "George, have pity on me. Only ten minutes, please, Listen."

His eyes were full of endless sadness and meaning. His burly body looked fragile and helpless. I felt pity for him. Of all the people in this room he was the one whom I did not want to deceive. I had felt that beneath his rough exterior somewhere a sad heart was beating. I came out with him.

The cool breeze outside calmed down both of us. The smiling moon was breaking itself in thousands on the waves of the bay. Silence everywhere. Silence and solitude are the two great balms of Nature which succeed where man fails to give peace. We sat down on a big boulder.

Rudy said, "George, you were right. There would have been blood-shed were I to marry. But I don't want to ask you why."

There was a touch of tears in his voice. Very softly I told him that he need not tell me his tale of woe.

"Tale of woe? Who told you that? You are young. What do you know of woes?" There was no edge in his questions.

"I don't want to know. I want to float down like a flower in the stream. Nothing would give me greater pleasure than not knowing what is woe."

He looked at me with a steadfast gaze and nodded dissent, "No, that can't be. You too will sometime experience sorrow. We are born for it. You will know what it is, particularly as you have come to a foreign country and may fall in love with a foreign girl".

I smiled and enquired what would happen if I were to love a girl of my own country.

"Even then you would experience sorrow. All love is pain. Even your own countrywoman becomes a stranger as soon as you love her. No longer does she remain the girl within your reach. Love lends her distance."

"I do not understand much of love. I should think that the girl of my heart's desire would come close to me through love itself".

But Rudy did not agree. According to him from near at hand love takes her far away. In other words you fall in love with one whom you consider a stranger from far away. Love is "the desire of the moth for the star".

I told him that this was a very sophisticated philosophy indeed.

His reply was startling. "You are probably wondering how a gipsy could think in this line. We live a very faithful domestic life after marriage and need not be worried with these ideas. But you will be surprised to know that I have read a lot of books on them. I wish I had not read them."

"I suppose you are a very warm-hearted people by nature. What could the Briton teach you anew in affairs de coeur?"

"That's a wrong impression, George", said Rudy. "You get such notions from the books of people like Lady Eleanor Smith and think that hot-blooded Romany women go on making love with gorgios in moon light. But it is just the contrary. Let a gorgio approach a gipsy girl with such intentions. His romance will come to an end with one hefty blow with a *Kash*. I mean log."

"Then why do you grieve?"

"There lay my discomfiture" was his startling reply. "We Romanies do not romance; but get married. But I fell in love"

"And then you found that by loving you have pushed your sweetheart far away?"

Rudy was silent for a few minutes. Then he said, "No. Not that. I fell in love because of her strangeness. She was a gorgio. A fair stranger."

I did not know what to say and kept quiet.

After a pause he started again, "She belonged to your civilised kind. She was ever new every moment, day and night. One had to strive always to get her. One *chumidav* i.e. charmed kiss for marriage could not win her as my wife."

: Pause again.

: Then he concluded, "That is why I did not get her."

: It was painful listening to the self-revelation of a simple-hearted huge human with a rough exterior. Curiosity on the other hand was unbounded. But he kept silent, probably engulfed in meditation, in memories past but poignant. If he did not want to disclose anything more I would not have the heart to ask for it.

: Ultimately I brought myself to put in this query, "You told me that there would have been blood-shed in your marriage. But you have not explained that."

He woke up gradually as if from a trance. Slowly and softly he narrated his story.

"We marry in day time. Children form the inner circle. Young boys and girls surround them in another. The last circle is made by adults. Within the innermost circle stand the bride and the bridegroom and extend their hands to each other. A small incision is made in her right palm and in his left one until they bleed. Then both palms are pressed together so that the blood gets into each other's body. Seven maidens tie the palms together with silk chords. Then comes the Chumidav i.e. the sacred kiss between them. The meaning is that you are now mine and I yours for ever and ever."

"What a romantic way of marrying! Admiration was ringing in my voice.

But Rudy was hurt. He said, "Do you know that it is for this bloody system that I could not marry? I had to leave my home with a bleeding heart. I had neither the *romerin* (marriage) nor the *rovell*" (bride).

I was spellbound. He went on as if addressing the silent sky, "But how *rikkeni* (beautiful) could have been my *boro dibbas* (day of festival) if Betty could step into my vardo!

Very tenderly as if asking myself I said, "But could she not? Did she not love you?"

"Yes, she did. She loved very dearly indeed. So much so that she was prepared to sacrifice her electric light and gas stove for the sake of coming to my vardo, to do her cooking in firewood in the light of an oil lamp".

"Then?" Only one word I uttered but it was full of questions.

"That was the trouble. I first met her in a raspberry jungle picking berries. I was doing the same. Both had the same object, making jam. She came to my place as I promised to teach her a new process of jam making. I was surprised to find it such a pleasure to teach her how to make jam. I promised then and there to teach her many new ways of cooking. But why did I do so?"

He seemed to be talking to himself when he repeated his own query, "why did I do so?"

"Probably because she was a sweet stranger" I tried to supply the reply.

"No. All gorgio girls are strangers to us. As our horse-

drawn caravans pass over village paths their wheels seem to strike deep into the hearts of gorgio young men. All those girls swarm round our moving household. They want to know how we carry on our daily life. On that pretext they go round and round us but we do not care to run after them."

"Quite natural that they would feel attracted towards your unknown ways of life".

"Yes, quite natural—this curiosity for the unknown and the unseen. You civilised people have your vision and movement all limited to civilisation only".

"What about you people?" I enquired without meaning any offence.

"We too do the same. But we are a wandering tribe. We do not settle down anywhere. Nor does our mind either. Not even for those girls of yours who are mad for romance. But they have infinite keenness at least for a cup of tea in the midst of our camp life."

It was getting very late. I tried to keep him within his story and asked him to tell me what had happened to him.

Very charming was his reply. He said, "What would happen to me? Betty appeared to me not a mere girl, but a lady; not a woman but a queen."

I said, "I understand. Then happened what had to happen."

Rudy became impatient. "No, you have not understood anything. So long as we are unmarried we see no harm in sporting with romance. Even now there would have been no objection if I took Betty as a mere woman. I would have played with her for a day or two as a girl easy of access, near at hand and run away on the third day with my moving establishment.

I tried to interpret his feelings in his own way. I became a little poetic too in that effort. "As soon as you discovered that you loved her she became a star and a mystery in your sky. Love did not bridge up the difference between you but built a barrage against the stream of familiarity."

"You have put it right", replied Rudy. "Since then she appeared in a strange light. As if she was an unfathomable mystery, without beginning and without end. My two hands and one heart were not enough to search out frantically the heart that lay concealed beneath that dazzling white skin of

hers. Her blue eyes brought to me the call of the blue ocean. It seemed such a sacrilege to print a kiss even on the waves of her golden hair. Right from under my control she took her place in the centre of my dreams."

The moon was hiding itself behind a hill on the other side of the lake. An occasional call of an unknown bird was breaking the silence. Nothing else seemed to exist in the world.

Rudy continued his story.

"The time came for moving from that village. Our headman gave only fortyeight hours' notice. It seemed to be the hanging order for me. Of course he had read the whole story from my face. He told me plainly that this won't do. A gipsy husband will not, like the gorgio counterpart, wake up his wife from beauty sleep with a cup of steaming tea in a winter morning. Romany life is not one long lazy kiss. Our girls marry to give plenty of children to their husbands, to be their comrades in highways and byways, to drown themselves in daily work to keep life going. They are like the vegetable creepers of India, not the Morning Glories of Europe.

"Shaking his mass of shaggy hair the headman declared that Betty was a garden-creeper. She would love, but not raise a gipsy family. Her nuptials must be accompanied by orange blossoms over a snow-white veil of gorgette. She would swoon at the sight of her bleeding palm".

Rudy sank down in the sea of memories. A sea quiet and motionless. A sea that did not even heave a sigh.

After a spell of silence he started again. "Probably that was right. Betty was intensely romantic. Just as only English girls can be. Just think of it. It is only infinite romance that impels them to marry foreigners. Though they know full well how often they are jilted. Just think of the amount of sacrifice and courage behind their marriage with foreigners ignoring all the barriers of race and religion.

I interrupted him with an involuntary jerk. "Often such marriages are just for the sake of having a home. A lot of worldly calculation lies behind them".

Rudy evidently did not like this interpretation.

He reproached, "Old boy, apparently you have not yet fallen in love. How could you understand the depth of a foreign girl's love?"

I realised that the story might be lost in a dissertation.

Hastily I admitted my greenness and told him to continue with Betty.

"What's the use of recapitulating the rest of the story? That evening while making her a cup of tea in my vardo I told her of the impending departure and my orders. My parents gave me the name Rudy. When Rudolph Valentino died thousands of girls wept in their lonely rooms. Now tears rolled down Betty's cheeks into the tea cup as she heard the death sentence on Rudy.

In bated breath I asked, "And what did you do?"

"What did I do? Probably a way out might have been found if I had argued with her or persuaded her to understand the situation. She might have asked me to abandon this gipsy life for her society. We might have gone to the leader together to get his permission and the chumidav would have followed. But I could not say a single word. Her tears slowly pushed me out of the room. I made myself busy with massaging the body of my horse outside and did not even notice when she went away."

"Why didn't you call her again next morning?"

"That next morning did not break for me in that village. I woke up to find that the caravan had started moving from the early hours of the morning. My vardo was just in the middle of the line, followed immediately by that of the leader. He was looking intently at my home. But what's the use of calling it a home when it could not be built at all!"

"What then?"

"Nothing at all. In my unbuilt home there was no room for the dream companion. I had not even asked her whether she was agreeable to cross its threshold and be mine."

"Why did you not? You must have had opportunities enough?"

"Yes. I did have them. But why don't you understand, young man, that I could ask this of the Betty whom I had invited there to sport with me. But the Betty whom I loved could not be asked to anchor her boat in quicksand. The barrier which the leader expressed in worldly terms was present in my mind from the very beginning. My eyes were closed when I first met her, but when the vision opened I found her so far away from me. As she drew near me in life she went further and further from my horizon".

A very complicated philosophy this. Not expected from a gipsy in any case. A temptation to hurt him grew in me. Who knew something more might come out.

With my eyes fixed somewhere on the other side of the bay I murmured, "It appears that the story does not end here. You can't feel so much pain for one who has left your life altogether."

But Rudy was not to be hurt. He said, "That is true, but still I feel an infinite sadness for her. You people cover up love with a veneer of sophistication, fall in fresh love and find out some fine philosophic excuse. We have no philosophy but only pain. We marry to build a home in our way. There we take root though without a roof solid over the head. We settle down in the midst of our wandering. That is our greatest asset. And I have not been able to get it."

I tried to console him. "You need not be sad about it. Why not think that you have saved the girl of your love from the supreme sacrifice of giving up her own way of life for this wandering one of yours? Let her stay in her own world, her own associations and environment."

Voice cannot have any colour. But the voice that came out of Rudy's face lit up by the light reflected from the bay can only be described as colourless. His words came floating to me as if from a distance. "I did give her that opportunity without protest or argument. But I am cursing myself for that. Do you know why?"

The change in the tone of his voice was surprising. The rough manner in which he had first spoken to me inside the hostel reappeared. I prepared myself for a new situation.

Sharply he said, "What good has that opportunity done her? Has she been happy in her usual surroundings? Has she gained by evading her romance with a gipsy? To-day, this very day I saw her near my caravan. Two hungry kids in a tottering pram and another hanging by her apron. Hunger and unhappiness writ large on their faces. And Betty, that lady of mine, brought them to my caravan to give them some free show. She—in tattered rags, with a dirty and defeatist bearing."

I kept silent. So did Rudy for a while.

It was he who started again. "You know, even that did not make me unhappy. After all if this was her fate she could

not have escaped it even by becoming a gipsy woman. But I was heart-broken to see that the lady in her has died. She has again come down very near, so easy of access. Oh, Lord!"

I tried to protest. That cannot be. Once a glorious lady, she should always be so to him. How can love change?

Softly he whispered, "Therein lies her death."

Then he got excited. He said, "Do you know that quietly I thrust a guinea in the palm of her young boy? I did n't say a word. I did n't want her to recognise me and feel embarrassed. But do you know what she did? After going just a few paces she opened the palm of the boy to see what was there. Then she gave a smile and threw a kiss at me. It hit me like a slap. I ran away to my vardo, the same one where I wanted to lay my heart out for her as a throne. Where I could not bring myself to even kissing her, lest that be a sacrilege".

I went on thinking. Why does he pine so much for the might-have-been queen of a home that never came into being? Why eat your heart out for the going away of one who never came into your life? Why does Rudy have such tender feelings, such subtle psycho-analysis? Where did he learn such incisive self-probing? In what school of humanity?

But I could not ask him anything. Lifting my head I saw the huge healthy Romany beating a slow retreat with his head drooping low. With his hands he was making his way through the wild shrubbery. How weak and helpless he seemed. A broken man whose every halting footstep was echoing defeat.

No. I could not ask him anything. He got lost in that half light and half darkness just as his dream of a queen in a home-to-be had faded before it could be born.

MAN AND THE METROPOLIS

I come back to civilisation. But it is only a bare London. I wonder if this is she whom I had left in all colour and bloom. She is now like the girl in long wait for her beloved, bereft of beauty and make-up. I renew my acquaintance with her with a sense of unhappiness. I miss that fulness of youth and charm. She reminds me of the deserted stage of the previous night's carnival with the candles going out one after another.

Our autumn and that of Europe are not of the same type. The seasonal classification is somewhat different. Here in England autumn reminds us of the pre-winter months in India. Our autumn no doubt plays with the clouds, but behind them peeps off and on the purest azure of the sky. Clouds are out on their last drenching missions, but they gradually give way to the blue of the sky. Oftener than not, as if by magic, it bursts forth in light and laughter. European autumn means that if it comes winter is not far behind. The very sky seems to contract, daylight recedes and days become shorter. Yet autumn has a reposeful influence. We do of course miss the first flush of May or the splendour of June. Rain and mist accompany but one feels a mild nip in the air. The sun's rays still soothe the eyes and impart a warmth of glow to faded yellow leaves, anxious not to push them too soon to dust, as they must later on. Nature still dreams, not of fossils but living things. The earth still smiles.

I sometimes wonder if I am the same self as left London a few weeks ago and is now back. Have I grown since then in aesthetic stature and in the enjoyment of beauty? Can I render an account of the change of my mind and where it stands to-day? I want to have a revaluation not only of myself but of everything under the wide sky. All my senses are keenly awake to realise the fundamental Europe in her fullest expression. I want to forget the past altogether so that it does not cast its slightest shadow on the present. But I cannot. Europe to me becomes the vision of a total reality. My mind is in search of her, here, there, everywhere like the brave knight of old on his flying horse in hot pursuit of his lady love in the grip of a giant.

My holiday is not yet over. Those who get fifteen days' leave in the year have all returned. I look at them with com-

passion and not superiority complex. My eyes are not yet tired of seeing things. I still look at them with wonder. I discover a new grace every day, a new charm, a new poise. A magician's wand invests life with a beauty that never was on sea or land. I see London wake up from a beauty sleep. I see the maids busy themselves with house work, milkmen leaving their bottles on doorsteps, her teeming millions of workers hurrying for the tube or the bus. What a cavalcade of men and women, young and old, boys and girls in various moods, in different gestures and postures. Here a handsome young man separates himself from the crowd and joins a young woman and they laugh and talk. For all I know they may be friends, they may be fellow workers in the same establishment. These votaries of life and cheer know how to utilise even these fleeting moments of companionship and to invest them with a charm. Most of them may not get married at all, at least not in their early lives. Yet they are men and women who have to work and mix with each other. Man does not shun woman as the "gateway of hell" as one puritan scripture of the India of mediæval stagnancy described her. Nor does woman avoid man as something to be afraid of. Nor does society dub this normal approach to companionship as something to be distrusted or ostracised. This attitude has a healthy effect on both. It cures them of precociousness. They rise in stature, in health and in social virtues. This has made man cultivate the need of catching the eye of woman as one among the many. Woman also does the same. This joint effort to be human and natural at every stage of life makes them, unlike us in the East, healthy, beautiful and normal. This worship of the beautiful has saved the youth in Europe from a sense of frustration which so often envelops young minds this side of Suez.

People sometimes ask how the evergreen queen Cleopatra, whose beauty and charm age could not mar nor close acquaintance wither, would look if she had to work as a housewife in one of the suburban flats. The wife of a husband in receipt of an income of £300 to £400 is an object of pity. Everybody sympathises with her. I do not however share such pessimism. It is true that so long as she has her youth—and the span of her youth is increasing day by day—she can settle by herself in a snug little flat without the bother of a husband. But she would have no permanent moorings. In this matter menfolk

are generally unlucky. They may be working in offices but they can hardly conjure up any creative atmosphere in those deadening surroundings. But a woman, however humble, may take you to her flat and show you her own creation where it breathes something of her own being. Gas and electricity have saved her labour and made life easy and decent. What does she worry about then? The truth is that today no one likes to be pinned down to a static home. The world outside calls. Its magic voice is more potent than the whisper of a quiet home. No one likes to go back to the dear old 'home'. The swing band of dance halls drowns the dinner gong back at home.

Often I go walking. I feel that if I do not do that all my mental expeditions would prove of no value. One has to lose himself in the motley crowd and then float down that stream of humanity to find sheet anchor somewhere in life's buoy. Otherwise one does not see, does not fulfil himself. An Indian student in London does not take pains to see London. He sees Paris, he goes to Berlin and Vienna. Nobody cares to see things near at home.

Somewhere I read that London was once called the city of cathedrals. Is there anybody who admits that today? Not that he refuses this title because he has been to Rome, Cologne or Seville but because there is no evident stamp of cathedrals on London. Who notices St. Martin's or even St. Paul's? Even the little garden squares have given up their festive appearance. The Bloomsbury gardens are almost lost in the expanding tentacles of the University. There is evidently a clash between the more earthly interests and the need for decoration and beauty. Add to this the fact that London is fast getting into the hands of commercial managers misnamed magnates and though she is the nerve centre of the world market and a cosmopolitan city through worldwide trade, she is paying for it dearly. Her old beauty spots are becoming insignificant day after day. Here you see fine techniques in construction but not an architect's dream. Even the heart of London, Piccadilly, rolling in pomp and luxury, has her colours dictated by neon advertisements. They are well-proportioned but not graceful. A traveller rarely takes interest in these light schemes. Even Eros is lost in this confusion of illumination. London is a mighty city but not a

magnificent metropolis. Her Thames is not the Seine or the Danube. As one passed through Fleet Street St. Paul's seemed submerged under the shadows of the pre-war monstrous mansions. The same is true of Westminster Abbey or the House of Parliament, if one happens to approach them not from the riverside. Worldwide commerce and empire are effacing the city's historic aristocracy.

It is some consolation, however, that those who are indulging in this brigandage are men of no mean education. What they are building may be vulgar as architecture but they do deserve praise as structure. The newspaper mansion which has reared its head near the St. Paul's is not a pavilion because it has neither grace nor beauty nor are its components of brick or stone. It is a colossus of straight lines in pure glass, a giant no doubt but one who nevertheless attracts. Take the case of a modern house in Brighton. There is no more of the blind imitation of the Tudor style. It does not also yield place to another complex composition. It is a fine beauty in straight lines. This is the motto of the Futurist Art. From wall to wall you have glass windows and side walls. From inside you seem to invite a mighty portion of the sky and the sea. From outside these windows look like so many arches in each storey. When illuminated they flash like so many parallelograms of light but they lack the grace of lighted lamps in a geometric symmetry. An artist would not, however, call these windows casements. There is simplicity in their lines but no complexity of artistic curvature. They are works of skill but not creations. They are born of necessity but they do not reflect the tradition of aristocracy.

One of England's well known architects has planned a village of the future. In the centre will be the church. Above and around it will be residential flats. There will be wireless, telegraph, telephone and even television. Thanks to the various building societies and fleeting automobiles Britain is bound to change her face. Till now one can discover a green village and a peaceful environment within a few miles of London. You may come across gypsies even. These descendants of the wandering Romany tribe fit in well with rural England. If one is lucky, he may tumble upon folk dances too. There is a conscious attempt to preserve old things both in villages and in towns. This tendency may not be lost in the village of the

future but it may lack the essence of it—the atmosphere of an ivy-covered lawn and the soft cadence of a distant flute in the deepening evening shadows. A village will then become the rural edition of Golders Green, a London suburb. We shall lose the green wide expanse, the cottages strewn here and there, the churches and the ewes, willows and poplars. In their place will spring up artificially reared up beauty spots where motorists and cyclists will throng on Sundays. They will get everything in the slot machine from chocolates down to shoe brushing. Yet there is some comfort in the idea that with a declining birthrate as now and the need for dispersal of population felt during the war it may not be necessary in the near future to have sky scrapers or flats in villages to house people.

This big, busy metropolis has not, however, forgotten the need for leisure and for open spaces. There are parks, squares and flowers in every locality. These are for all and sundry, not like the old Moghul gardens of India reserved for the fortunate few. There is nothing extraordinary here. Eyes accustomed to oriental gardens may not find pleasure here, but they are there for the common man. One may meet even the Royalty riding in the Hyde Park while in the Serpentine a few yards away people would go boating for a shilling a cruise. A young girl loses a handkerchief. Out comes at once a burly constable and restores it to the lawful little owner. None need tremble at the sight of this mighty guardian of law and order. If there is anything to be specially seen at London it is her police man. This sixfooter is always ready to assist the passer by. And he in turn is assured of everybody's help even in the densest of crowds. This trait is a national one. In the evening when the crowds are returning from their work they follow instinctively the rules of the road. Each one has the sense to co-operate and to contribute to these. Yet all of them are in a hurry. Some have engagements, some go to theatres, some to clubs, home calls the rest. They all move but do not shove in an attempt to by-pass others. Every one accepts discipline. It is ~~in~~ ⁱⁿ the blood; it is their friend and not fetter.

II

Londoners of to-day do not read poetry. Not that they have nothing to do with romance, but it hardly rhymes with

verses these days. They cannot forget the two World Wars with a narrow gap of two decades and their terrible lessons. Life to them is too real, too earnest, a bitter frustration and sometimes an endless chain of shattered dreams. The two wars have changed not only the face of London but her soul also. Those young men who had passed through the baptism of fire in the first war are either dead or old and it is their children who are now canon fodder. Some of the young men had, as children, seen their fathers die, their mothers cry and sisters weep. An indelible stamp of fear is on these young faces. Overhead and under ground, night and day they have seen Death's chariot pass and heard the mighty roar of its remorseless wheels. Death to their right, death to their left volleyed and thundered.

London has also witnessed the gradual disruption of family life. London proper does not as a rule boast of families except a favoured few. Home is still rarer. Here all family ties and conventions seem to have been washed away by the tidal waves of modernism. The result is that man plods on, weary and alone. Woman also does the same, though she has come out of her sheltered seclusion. Man has enlarged his heart's horizon. Woman too has become bolder. To man she is no longer a romantic mixture of half reality and half imagination. She is now his full competitor in every field. She is or wants to be economically independent. She earns her own livelihood. She takes the rough with the smooth. Naturally she has to come down from her romantic pedestal, from the place of honour reserved for her. These days a man rarely gets up from his seat to offer it to a woman in a crowded bus or train. And she does not care either. She wants equality of treatment. She is now a co-worker and not merely a woman. She is first a comrade and then a sweetheart. Woman has gained in her youthful attraction but lost in romantic charm. Freed from the bother of housekeeping and all the worries of a housewife she is expressing herself in sports and manly activities and in various other ways. The race of romantic 'She', the cynosure of all eyes, is fast disappearing. She is no longer the mystic vision slowly to be unveiled. She is out in the full exposure of daylight. She claims to be as much human as man. No longer the prima donna of the artist, she refuses to be the heroine of a languishing verse. A modern

poet would talk of her as a companion, of her contribution to the collective life of the campus or the college, her sparkling camaraderie in trips and excursions in green meadows, her musical tastes, her part in an extravaganza, a soiree or a concert, but would hardly depict her as a wife or lovelorn lass. Not that the early nineteenth century romance of the woman has totally disappeared. It does continue to appear off and on the screen in a Ruritanian atmosphere.

Poetry does not depict home life to-day. It got the first rude shock of cruel encounter in the first World War. From war poetry turned to the country, sometimes with pride in its past, sometimes with doubt in its future, but never with despair. Poets have sung of the old school-tie, of the green countryside, of heroic memories and associations. The poetry of nature is tinged with local feelings and the love of nature with sympathy for animals. Regionalism and rationalism are both ruling out romance. The sense of fellowship and the love of life are both marked because of the events which have threatened both. Companionate attachment and fidelity to life are themes of greater interest. In the inevitable collapse of moral codes loyalty still remains the creed, but not in its logical application to the relation between man and woman.

In the thoughtless self-centred crowd that is London, in the moving drama that is its streets, in the huge human spectacles, in the continuous stream of humanity every morning and evening do I find any echo of London's inner voice? Yet how easily it finds expression in verse, variety in rhyme, spice in songs and stories. Viewing the city's highways from a human angle these paths pale into insignificance as the mere means of communication. They pulsate with life. One feels that in this detached but work-weary town it is a privilege and a pleasure to live. I am not spending my time merely in studies. I keep the window of my mind open. I see human mind at work. And hardly realising it I discover the truth that even if a Londoner has no interest except in whiling away his spare time in watching exhibitions of football, cricket or cinema or even if he looks disinterested, he has really a hidden fund of mental freshness and strength. He may not of course fool himself in a sentimental outburst on the pangs of separation but he is a connoisseur nevertheless. When June comes with its soft beauty and touch in flowers and trees a Londoner

certainly does not feel that life is an empty dream. With the dawning light the lark sings at his doorstep and window sill. The faint fragrance of flowers stimulates him like a tonic wine. He feels that life is worth living in a world which has been waiting for him with all its beauty. The very unknown Londoner who may have thoughtlessly read lines like the following without a flutter in the heart

“She singeth and I do make her a song
And read sweet poems the whole day long
Unseen as we lie in our hay built home”

can leap into action when the call comes. However absorbed he might have been in the great life of the metropolis and its ramifications, he may prepare himself for a great sacrifice worth recording in deathless chronicles. This has been proved again and again in the wars, in the blitz, in the battle for London and in the fact that London can take it. These are the heroes of everyday life, ordinary men who have spread themselves in the four corners of the earth. These are the men who belong to the race of empire builders.

The wars have proved that English poetry can easily thrive without love as its mainstay. In fact an intense feeling of patriotism has taken its place and modern English life rings with an echo of the theme that no sacrifice for the country can be too big. I wonder whether London believed in eternal peace after the First World War. In any case the second one was a bitter lesson. But she did not falter. She took it. Her thoughts might have been of the days gone by. She might have looked wistfully back on the glory that was England. But she never despaired. Her men and women dally in love but they bring it down from a romantic pitch to one of everyday touch where the possibilities of response are as great as those of unrequited love. This attitude accepts with a grace that if really separation has to come let it be a patient and decent denial rather than an unseemly fight over a lacerated heart. These are the men who would not hesitate in their prime of youth to shed every drop of their hot blood in a far-off battle field to maintain a tiny outpost. These are the men who find comfort in the thought that Death becomes deathless if the heart stream flows true even in petty pastimes. These are the men who think that it is better to have one bright starlit night of fame than all the fruitless faint daylights of a whole life.

This is more or less the characteristic of Europe's youthful dynamism. It never stagnates. It is never static. In his immortal poem 'Taj Mahal' Tagore interpreted the dynamism of human heart in the following famous lines.

Alas, thou heart of man,
Too brief a span
Hast thou to cast back lingering eyes
(On things that thou dost prize.
From quay to quay, on life's current swift
Dost thou drift;
What takest from one fair or market town
Thou needs must elsewhere lay down.

This philosophy of human relations must be understood in all its aspects if the modern European youth is to be understood at all. It teaches that if the pangs of separation are inevitable let them take their normal course. Let not the effort to estimate its wrong or justice introduce an element of irritation or effervescence. If per chance the name of the parted sweetheart comes unwarily to somebody's lips let that be accepted as a casual mention of an impersonal somebody, as a faint reflection of a past that will not cast its shadow too long.

It is not surprising that the need for poetry has decreased in an age when man and woman easily come so near and as easily separate—whether for reasons of life or of living. When even incompatibility of temperament makes one human being so distant from another, when individuality gets the better of tender feelings for another, how can poetry put much premium on love? To a modern flapper orthodox fidelity is hardly more than an airy sentimentality. Tennyson's idea of love is not for this age, nor are the steadiest ideas of Browning. In their world the grief-stricken lover could put a leaf in the closed palm of the dead beloved and hope that in the countless streams of birth after birth in some life he would get her back. But this can be no consolation to the lover of to day. He does not find much stability even in this very life. How can he expect it hereafter?

If the present is so blank what reliance can he have on the future? One who has come to realise that 'it fades from kiss to kiss' has had to pay dearly, very dearly indeed. That is

why hearts have lost their permanent moorings and require the healing touch of the many. In the carnival of life come new acquaintances on its diverse meandering paths. New faces, new passions and new memories too. How can one guarantee that a new vision should not triumph over the old? What is the use of fanning flames that have turned into ashes?

Memory is cold and belongs to yesterday while love is warm and pertains to to-day. The youth of to-day wants everything served hot. Living beings ask for a romance that is still alive. The footprints on the sands of time may bring back memories but even in a four dimensional world they will not bring back the beloved in actual flesh and blood. Why then pine for the days that are lost? Why not drown your sorrows in new cups? Nothing in this world is permanent, least of all memories. In the ceaseless march of time tomorrows fast turn into yesterdays. What is new to-day becomes old to-morrow. Is it wise in the circumstances to fret for the past? This philosophy reminds us of Heraclitus, of Omar Khayyam, of Tagore and of Bergson. One particular drop of water in a moving stream is as much true as the next one. A young girl feels attracted to a man in a moonlit night. Yes, they do feel attracted all the while notwithstanding. He remembers in turn his old flame who might have told him to take it easy like the ripe fruit on a tree which must fall one day by the simple law of gravitation. She might have told him that "like ships that pass in the night" throwing their friendly lights on each other through the darkness they too might pass away from each other's ken sometime. Thoughts and memories would rush in like a flood and the old would yield place to the new and be swept under the whirling eddy that is life to-day.

This is all the more so when intense individualism leaves no room for rivalry. I must be the sole queen of your heart. The old-world picture of one reigning like the moon in the firmament while other stars also twinkle will not do for this age. I must own your heart alone and no shares are allowed, however much the philosopher cries that it is possible to love more than one at a time.

And yet the modern sophisticated woman finds it psychologically impossible to entirely ignore the previous love lives, desires and hankerings. Gone is her home, thanks to emanci-

pation. Doubtful is the prospect of settling down with a husband. Nor may she find even a lover. This is sad no doubt but it has its compensatory values also. She takes life lightly and does not go under. One chapter may close for her with tears in the eyes but yet another may open with a blush and a smile. And behind all this there is a current of philosophy. Failure to appreciate it means failure to understand the youth of modern Europe. In the words of the poet this can be summed up in the line

"I have been faithful to thee, Cynara, in my
fashion."

It is well nigh impossible to give an estimate of English character in such a Galahad way. His body is big and heart bigger. He talks little and his friends are fewer. He rarely comes out of his shell to give vent to his inner thoughts. Outwardly he is a flotsam in the stream of life like so many gay *flowers dedicated to the worship of self*. Yet in a rare moment and on a rare occasion he expresses a thought or two too deep for tears. Such a moment opens up a new vision, throws a flood of light on his mind and gives a new orientation to his outlook. This fundamental strength, his innate sense of justice and beauty, this deep fidelity reveal a heart responsive to humanity's pains and sorrows.

John Bull's character is like a multi-coloured dome. Take the case of a professor of mine. He was a book-worm. All his mental get-up was typically English with all its sharp insularities. He was like an old oak with its old roots spread over the soil. How we used to caricature this old man. Would you believe that on a May day when the golden hue of the morning sun was lighting up the little back garden in all its smiling glory, this old invalid was not to be found in his usual chair! He was discovered under a blooming cherry tree reading his *Housman*. There were tears in his eyes and tenderness in his recitation. These meant the joy and gratefulness of a heart that never grew old, all his pedantry and old frame notwithstanding.

IN SEARCH OF SPAIN

From Bordeaux to Irun Pass was a passage through a dream. A dream the Pyreness enjoys every smiling night. My journey was lit up by the silver rays of the nearly full moon. The night also found an expression in the deep notes of Spanish rustic songs. The melodies seemed so familiar. Somehow or other they struck a sympathetic chord in my heart. It lay practically sleeping for the last two months of the English winter. The fine decorum, the perfect music and the exact discipline of the London Concert halls did not at first get sufficient response from this foreigner. They were the demonstrations of philharmonic orchestra or music in their London surroundings but hardly the spontaneous expression of an individual's urge. That is why these rustic songs of Spain in that Franco-Spanish border town overwhelmed me so much in that silent moonlit night. In spite of the strange language and mountain fastnesses I right away welcomed Spain into my heart.

Light and more light....I feel as if I have come face to face with life again. Nobody can deny that even the misty melancholy of London has a beauty of its own. You have to court long before you come to appreciate it. It is only then that London unveils her true self. One would have to lose one's way in the fog and tune oneself to finding joy in the quest of the unknown. He would have to miss the tube and his college classes in a December morning without a sigh, take a bus or train, and go out of the city to see the pale yellow sun smile at the truant for being late. In a bleak cold night he would have to go to skate in a far off frozen pond not under powerful electric lights but under misty moonlight. One who could do that might discover behind England's dark pall a superb grandeur where the earth and the sky throb in unison and sit in silent meditation. But even then the English landscape in winter often produces a sense of weariness. That is why Spain's fresh light was so welcome. It imparted a new life to me.

In that beautiful smiling dawn one could not help noticing the soft blue mist clinging lazily to the peaks of the Pyrenees. They trailed off like the fading memories of a beautiful dream. I really felt that I was officiating as the priest at the birth of

a perfect dawn. I did shed a few years from my age and became a boy again. I left behind the worries of my studies. My mind was as light as the care-free singing bird in the sky. I saw the dawn, like a shy maiden on a stolen visit to her lover, disappearing in light fleeting footsteps as the day woke up.

The wintry winds still blew. A few Spaniards covered in blankets were out on the road; a mule cart waiting aimlessly, a few shops just open, a half-hearted effort to cleanse a rubbish heap in front of one of them, a slowly moving donkey—completed the picture. I compared with it a London morning: the busy maids, the milkman's hurry, the rush of workers for the tubes and the buses. I looked at the deserted streets. I looked back towards my country. I also took a peep into my new mind, alert and pulsating with an abundance of enthusiasm. I realised that English education was having its effect on me. That explained my love for the busy, active and successful symphony of life in England.

I felt the solar warmth in my mind also. I had this experience in England too. If by chance the sun appears unexpectedly in the English sky people make it an occasion for an outdoor picnic. Crowds gather in London's parks and open spaces. They become full of sun worshippers. London is not like Calcutta. In its every ward and borough there are public parks and squares which are the lungs of London where people breathe at ease, walk at will. In the midst of this giant city's dynamic life they have not forgotten nature's beauty and freshness and their usefulness in the nation's life. This is strikingly apparent not only in rich London but also in small towns and villages. There is a conscious effort and a virile will to keep the surroundings in a clean and tiptop condition. It would be idle to accuse me of commencing to see through European eyes. But whenever I have cared to compare rural Europe with rural India I have felt that our poets have not truly described my country. They have taken the help of so much colour and imagination in their writings that the result is somewhat unreal. Being away for long I may have lost some of the colourful impressions of my country. But how can I forget that our villages are not what they are painted to be. The poet's description of them as beaming with life and beauty and joy corresponds more with Hardy's English villages than with our own.

(In India many think that Spain is the India of Europe or rather a bit of India misplaced in Europe. I naturally feel tempted to check up this idea. True, I do not notice the activity and enthusiasm of the North in this hilly country of Southern Europe. That is true also of Andorra, the tiny principality lying between Spain and France. In the streets and in the open there is hardly a sense of rush. Here maidens saunter slowly with a rhythm but hardly with vivacity. In London's crowded streets everyone follows the traffic rules. He knows that these are there to help and regulate and not to obstruct. These are rules and not restrictions.

Spain's rural costumes are also not exactly European. One of course does not expect in this sunny land an exact replica of the tight dresses that are necessary in the cold North. Women here use a kind of lace bordered silk shawl on their back. Beautiful women look lovelier like the pale yellow roses in a bouquet. There is a peculiarity in the caps of the males. The Moors were the master of Spain for many centuries. Even in the 15th century they ruled most of the country. There was considerable admixture of blood of the Moors and the Jews with the indigenous people before the reign of Philip II. This mixture has left its stamp on their features as well as demeanour. And on national characteristics too. Spaniards are a little stout and short. They have an olive complexion and not the unrelieved white of the North. Their eyes are deep and black. There is a suggestion of Eastern lasciviousness in their eye-lashes. They make friends easily. They talk without restraint and as easily they lose temper and patience. They remind us of the people east of Suez. While out on the street you can see enacted within a short time scenes of new acquaintances ripening into expressive friendship and side by side rehearsals of intense hatred and violent enmity. Nature has a great moulding effect on man. The sun and the snow have a considerable influence in building up character. Moreover, the long Moorish rule has left its deep impression on national character. History shows however that Spain tried its level best to eradicate this foreign influence. She waged relentless war on the Moors and the Jews. She took the role of Europe's protector of race and religion against the infidel and sent legions in that era not

only to different parts of Europe, but to the outer world as well. She trampled the liberties of others in the name of religion and European nationalism. Fanaticism put on the cloak of heroism and kept the love of fighting alive. This effort only hastened her political decadence and the downfall of her nobility. Her subjects abroad often rebelled just in the same way as people did in the intolerant empires of the East. Such cruelty and fanaticism practised for long periods are not the characteristics of Europe. Spain does not represent Europe in many respects.)

That is why I could not restrain a feeling of surprise when my eyes fastened on a girl dressed immaculately in the latest American fashion in the midst of a crowd of Spanish women in their normal attire. Light and shade and a bluish mist were playing on the top of the cliff near by. The bright afternoon was fast fading into an evening grey and its last splendours were reflected on a dreamy lake on the way to San Sebastian from Irun. In the mysterious magic of the approaching evening I realised that this girl also was Spanish though out on a hike like me. No, she was not beautiful but sparkling. Her long shapely fingers had an invisible grace which would impart a charm to whatever she touched. An Eastern poet would compare her with a sylvan doe. Yet she was urban to her very finger tips. I wondered whether she still retained the sense of genuine admiration and the gift of expressing it spontaneously. Perhaps a woman of this type has built a shell around her and cannot easily think of anything or anybody beyond herself. This is the inevitable price which beauty, blasé with adulation, has to pay in a civilised society where men and women mix freely and artificially. To be fair to her, she was at times expressing her wonder at the scenic beauty through which we were passing—the colourful sky, the bluish mountains, the antique costumes of the people, the grace of their movements. She was also sometimes exclaiming in sheer delight—"Oh, how beautiful, is n't it?" Yet somehow it seemed that in that quiet and majestic environment she was feeling herself a stranger from another world. She could not respond to the silent call of Nature, its call for the great unknown. Standing there in her bright outfit of the latest style against the background of a greying self-effacing evening she looked a misfit. Her half slanting pose with one hand

consciously tucked into the side pocket of her skirt would be a fascination in the Carlton Club but here it looked more like a protest against the ensemble of Nature. Hers was a stroll in the boulevard, not a travel in the beauty of Nature. She was self-conscious at every step. Her mental make-up was a product of Paris, her measure of life the fashion of the day.

Wherever one may go one finds such tourists. American tourists have come to be known as a type by themselves. But why the Yankees alone? People take to touring mostly as a fashion. All they want is to be able to boast in their club or society that they have been here, there and everywhere. Most of them succumb to the bland advertisements of tourist agencies and addresses of professional guides. Without opening their eyes and without a query they see as a matter of routine the famous art galleries, museums, zoos, forlorn palaces and haunted castles. They dine in hotels and hobnob there. They club together with other tourists to avoid the prospects of adventure. If they happen to be English or American they would more often than not take shelter in a hotel where English is spoken. In this respect a foreign student with limited means is more fortunate. He would have to take shelter in a native hotel or as somebody's paying guest. He will have to lunch or dine at a wayside cheap restaurant within the reach of his pocket. He will have to find out such places with an effort which itself may land him in adventures. He will have to make acquaintances with the local people and thus get under their skin. His greatest asset is that he is not out to forget or beguile himself. He comes out to see and awake.

Most of the European or American tourists are impelled to go abroad for a specific mental reason. They want to forget themselves. The fickleness of fortune, aimlessness of life and futility of ambition impart to their lives a ceaseless purposeless speed. They become a flotsam in the stream of life which at times becomes too strong for them to resist. I cannot but come to this conclusion while bathing in the placid waters behind the breakwaters of San Sebastian, Spain's famous sea resort off the Bay of Biscay. The blue sleepy sea spreads out as far as the eyes can see. By its side the hills rise, green with verdure and full of trees. Tourists rarely merge themselves into such scenes. They revel in their saline baths. They tear through the smooth tarred roads in their powerful American

cars. In the evening they dance and drink in the halls of luxury hotels. Their main motto seems to be to drown in forgetfulness the seamy side of their life. This attitude has almost become an obsession with them. Forget life's fitful fever in fleeting pleasures. Float down their stream in thoughtless abandon lest thoughts should rear their ugly head and remind you of yourself. Fill your days with the mad pursuit of business and your nights with the insanity of excitement. Charge your glass of holidays with the wine of novelty. Let not the thought of this helpless tiny life make you apprehend its end. The infinite and eternal does not offer any assurance to the finite and measured span of life of such people. "Why fret about to-morrow if to-day be sweet?" asked the Persian poet of pagan pleasures. Yes, there may not be a morrow.

Unfortunately, however, even this quest of pleasure does not bring solace for long. Diversions are light and belong to to-day, to the surface only. Nobody thinks in terms of the morrow, of the deeper life within. The future, the revaluation of values, do not come into the calculation. Not that people do not understand. But they are afraid to acknowledge the eternal values. The great contribution of Freud's psychoanalysis to mental therapy has been the unearthing of an inner conflict between our overt desires and those buried deep in the sub-conscious. You see it best reflected in these men. That is why they are in search of one excitement after another. They know not what they want. They go from one pleasure haunt to another and yet they feel 'blasé' and in the midst of all this speed and stimulus they cry out in their solitary moments 'How boring.'

A cold December morning was just peeping out from the blanket of slumber. Snow had accumulated overnight and the early rays of the sun were being reflected thereon. A soft faint streak of light entered the huge cathedral of Salamanca through its stained glass windows and settled on the cross behind a marble arch. I was struck with wonder at the artistic representation of three schools of art—Moorish, Byzantine and Gothic, harmoniously blended together in a perfect order of evolution. But another spectacle caught my eyes. I looked with surprise at a black-robed kneeling old Spaniard, deep in meditation. That day I realised with a shock that Christianity

was the gift of the East to the West. Nowhere in Europe, except occasionally in its churches, could I see this moving scene. This is a very familiar sight with us, one with which our hearts feel in tune. The very piece of land on which this old man knelt in prayer seemed like a lost islet of the East transplanted there. If any force has put a brake on the West's blind speed, its remorseless momentum and love for the transient, it is the influence of true Christian life. It has put a premium on the permanent values of life. It is Christianity which has contributed stability to the restlessness of Europe, has turned its attention from restiveness to restraint, from self-forgetfulness to meditation, from matter to spirit.

Salamanca is an unsullied picture of old Spain. Fortunately there has been no attempt at modernising it. It still lives in that age in which thousands thronged through its narrow serpentine lanes to hear Galileo propound his revolutionary theories of astronomy or Columbus describe his wonderful discovery of the gorgeous Ind with its strange people and stranger riches.

The twentieth century has not yet put its impress on the fine carvings of the classical Casa de las Conchas. Salamanca surpassed Venice in the middle ages in fine coloured paper-making and leather work. Even to-day college students use handmade leather wraps for their books. Twentyfive colleges and sixty monasteries still count as their greatest treasure the valuable libraries of such well preserved and decorated books, particularly the religious ones. From whatever corner of the town I see, the great cathedral is the one sight that arrests the eyes. Above all the clash and clamour, din and bustle, duties and activities of this small town stands this great embodiment of its faith and hope, of achievement and inspiration. Those who say that the West has no need of religion do not correctly understand the mass mind. It is true that even in Spain the Republican Government had disestablished the Catholic church after the fall of Alfonso. That Government had also abolished the schools maintained by churches, and done away with the various religious endowments. This had its terrible effects, however. There were political unrest and instability. Various fissiparous peasant and labour movements grew up and weakened national life. Some vices crept into the Spanish church no doubt. To a certain extent it became worldly

minded. To be a prelate was to take up a comfortable profession. But the fact could not be dismissed that the church was a part and parcel of their community life and could not be dismissed with a wave of the hand or the decree of a leader or of the state. In a land partitioned and maladministered and without any fixed policy, religious feeling supplied the only unity among diversity. The church was the only cement that kept together the diverse scattered and warring elements of national life. By religion I do not mean only an institution for the succour of the soul in the life hereafter. The great Indian epic, the Mahabharata, defines religion as

“Something that has the quality of holding together.

By religion are people held. Whatever has this quality is religion.”

It was religion alone which held the bewildered and disillusioned people of Spain together and gave some stability to their character. In the heart of the old man I saw kneeling in prayer in that vast and magnificent cathedral religion contributed the central equipoise. He had a quiet refuge in his own heart. When he comes to be deprived of its protection it would be quite easy for him to join the ranks of the student revolutionaries of Barcelona.

The famous Escorial with its church and monasteries, its royal palace and memories still stands as the undying symbol of Spain's past and the great faith she bears. It is a priceless legacy of her old days which time has not yet undone. An illuminating candle that still remains lit. Judged by this standard Escorial ranks above Delhi and Fatepur Sikri in India. This place is the mute sentinel of a silent and forgotten age. Its palace still stands but not the palace guards nor the sweet ladies. Delhi has been born again in New Delhi. Its streets resound to-day with the footsteps of a new bureaucracy. The old aristocracy is no doubt dead and gone but a new one has taken its place. Like Fatepur Sikri the deserted capital of Emperor Akbar, Escorial is, however, living in the past merely carrying on the dim torch of the days that were great in Spain's annals. The environments are still the same. The people still talk in terms of ideas which held sway in the middle ages. The people still dream of them. They talk of Carlos Quinto (Charles V) and Philip Segundo (Philip II) as if they were friends with whom they parted company only

yesterday, as if the trail of dust from the hoofs of their horses is still visible in the bridleparks under the blue shadow of Sierra Guadarama.

Escorial has hardly any contact with the outside world. It is only an hour's run from Madrid on the Madrid-Paris Express. But Madrid's troubles and discontent do not create a flutter here. Life goes on as usual. Phillip II desired that his last days should be spent here in an atmosphere of peace and religious ceremonies. Uneasy lies the head that wears the crown. Throughout his life Phillip had to carry on his intolerable imperial burden. Wars, insurrections, scramble for power and position in the court had thoroughly made this fanatically religious emperor's life a succession of ceaseless worries. But his monastic palace at Escorial continues to dream in undisturbed peace. Saints' festivals are still celebrated here in this dusty but pompous place. An unspeakable charm envelopes this greying place when incense burns and bells ring and the bluish shadow of Sierra Guadarama seems to settle on the horizon. The suburb also retains its pristine charm and seems to have come out of the pages of the middle ages and taken its earthly abode here. Street urchins ask for just a peseta in such a charming way in the gardens of the Infant's palace that you can hardly consider that as begging. The whole atmosphere is still surcharged with a mediaeval atmosphere. When at the end of the day dark shadows deepen over olive groves on the slopes of hills, when the shepherds bring their herds back home, the bells of the mule caravan chime ding dong, one feels that one can with ease recreate the whole scene. One can almost start waiting for the varied procession which would trail its way to the old emperor's palace where luxury was taboo but grandees were not. Is this place still dreaming of the Spanish nobility, proud of their birth and place in the court, attired in their quaint costumes? Or of the dare-devil seekers of fortune who had crossed the seven seas in search of riches untold? With wonder in their dark eyes senoras would throng the balconies of the stone houses. Some senorita would perhaps stop playing the guitar and run down the stairs with expectation deeply moving her bosom. Her glances would flash in search of her prince charming for a while and disappear in a trice. Malta comes back to my memory. There, too, gazelle eyes steal glances at

the winding lanes and disappear. But women with steady and elderly gaze proudly conquer the scene with black silk shawls draping the shoulder. They care not for the foreigner at all.

Across the vast expanse the southern gate of the monastery towers supreme. It is impossible to conceive of any light-hearted gaiety where austere Phillip's memory dominates. The unusual brilliance of the marble caskets in the Pantheon or the royal tombs surpasses even the white shimmer of the Taj Mahal marbles. In these dark chambers of death have been preserved in a real imperial setting the ashes of the emperors from Charles V in beautiful urns. The guide showed me one such coffin and said, "*This was meant for King Alfonso, but alas the bird had already fled before it could be caged.*" He however was immediately repentant of this humour and with moist eyes knelt and prayed and signed the Cross on his breast. It was apparent that the saint had triumphed over the socialist.

There is no dearth of interesting things here from the historical point of view. The very table on which the tireless Phillip worked to keep his far-flung empire intact, the very clock which ticked before him are still there in the same position. The bridal chamber of Phillip and Queen Mary of England, and the honeymoon bed have been preserved exactly as they were then. The seats of the various ambassadors, arranged as they were then, stare you in the face as if awaiting the return of their rightful occupants. Phillip's library was one of the magnificent ones of those days. He spent a fortune in collecting books and arranging them. He also collected a number of masterpieces and he and his successors endowed the palace at Escorial with famous paintings. The palace was full of the works of Titian, Tintoretto, and Velasquez. Most of them were destroyed by fires and the vandalism of Napoleon's troops. A few were transferred to Madrid. But even then the worth of the remnant is colossal.

Any lover of painting would like to compare the Last Supper of Titian herewith the same subject painted by Leonardo da Vinci and preserved in the Louvre.

There is another exquisite specimen of art here in the frescoes painted in the walls—the whole life of Jesus Christ by Peregrin, Louis de Carbajal, Carducci and Lucca Jordano. The one showing the removal of Christ's body from the Cross is an unforgettable picture, deep in pathos and exquisite in

execution. Art flourished here on the representation of Christ's life and in every nook and corner of Spain the artist's brush and imagination were at work depicting the same subject in so many ways.

The dwellers of the Iberian peninsula were the most intolerant of all the European races who came to India during the Mahomedan rule in search of India's fabulous riches. During the sixty years that Portugal was under Spain, their rancour against idolatry was most pronounced. Yet, the wonder is that in that age in Spain the people themselves were apparently no less idolatrous. If adoration of God in some form is taken as idolatry they have hardly changed since then. Go to the cathedrals at Salamanca, Toledo or Escorial and you find the same routine of the burning of incense, floral offerings, lit candles and lamps, kneeling down in prayers morning and evening, celebration of festivals. You see the same ceremonial trek to holy places, pilgrimages, the same confession, the same humility before a cathedral as one of my faith would show before a temple. The most convincing example of this was the cathedral of Escorial. Everywhere you find Mother Mary's figures in stone as well as in earth. An exquisite image has got a sylvan background with forests and fountains, pebbles submerged in water and concealed lights to complete the ensemble. Just like the background our Hindu students prepare for the worship of Saraswati, the goddess of learning. Mother Mary is being revered there in the same way as the former would be. The very spirit and atmosphere are exactly the same. The real difference, however, is that this adoration is restricted to the Holy Trinity. This is the only trio to be worshipped and not the myriads as in the old orthodox Hindu pantheon.

In the entire mental field of Spain, conscious or sub-conscious, only one thing mattered—and that was the life of Christ. Her religion, her politics, her royalty all converged on that consciousness. That has been her misfortune too. All that the royalty did was to build cathedral after cathedral with the colossal wealth that her subjects could gather or plunder from the new and the old world. At the same time the poor became poorer. The common man went hungry and without education while he saw the temples of faith grow up in grandeur. The deity was more important than the country. A

preacher ranked above a soldier. An artificial aristocracy reinforced by the membership of the church and not by merit on the battlefield or in statesmanship made the country weak and indolent. Political blindness drove out of the realm the Jews and the Moors, merchants and peasants respectively, the men who actually produced wealth. Freedom of speech and thought was stifled. I saw young boys leading the chorus in to-day's church service at the Escorial. I was wondering what the specific value of their contribution was towards moulding national life. Would their chanting of the Mass in resonant voices help to wake up the hidden humanity of the nation?

There is one striking feature and its value cannot be over-estimated. The Catholic religion has produced for Spain her greatest arts. Architecture and painting developed under the inspiration of this religion. The artist's one object was to depict Christ's life and glorify it. The royalty and the nobility were active patrons of art because they wanted to preach Christianity through painting and sculpture and architecture. They endowed many churches. This is more or less true of the Catholics throughout the length and breadth of Europe. From the point of view of art, Protestants in the middle ages curbed rather than created it. Except Bach, no other Protestant composer's name would come to your mind at short notice.

Dearly, very dearly indeed, had Spain to pay for her extremist outlook. No other European state sowed the seeds of its own downfall so heavily as Spain. France too was Catholic but not to such an extent. Italy also was a Catholic country. Here also art and culture flourished as nowhere in Europe, but she did not go to the length of Spain and deprive herself of the essential needs for the sake of religious frenzy. Spain went to the extreme. It was like the perfect make-up of the countenance while the body remained dirty and neglected. That is one of the reasons why Spanish art lacks the pagan joy of creation, the sensuous touch of Parnassus.

Yet the emperor whose politics and proselytism made him the protagonist of the Catholic faith through sword, stakes and inquisition spent his last days as a weak, simple and helpless recluse. What an irony of fate! The church of Escorial was more magnificent than the palace. In his old age Phillip's physical inability prevented him from joining the Mass and he used to look at the service through an aperture in the palace.

That humble room is the best attraction for the tourist to-day.
Phillip was the Aurangzeb of Spain.

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I am reminded again of India in Madrid. In its streets there is neither the iron discipline of Berlin nor the smooth flow in perfect order of the crowd of London. On the night of the 31st of December the Madriderers meet in Puerta del Sol to ring out the old year and ring in the new. The riotous merriment there reminds me of what we see in our land on springtime festive days. They move about in streets, talk in groups and pay little heed to traffic rules or the convenience of others. They act as if they are in sole legal possession of the street. Madrid is a city of crowds and uproar. Everybody seems to be talking and above the din and bustle ring the bells of the automatic traffic signals along with the flash lights. Spain's capital is small and beautiful, but the lady protests too much.

Spain has not received from the foreign traveller her due share of recognition and respect. The main reasons are her own underdeveloped status, internal troubles and the want of publicity abroad. Otherwise there should be more art lovers visiting Prado as the world's greatest art gallery. I feel that masters like Greco, Murillo, Velasquez and Goya do not receive the publicity they deserve. This is not only apparent but patent if one was take a more detailed and disinterested estimate of Prado.

Born in Crete, Greco was the disciple of Titian. He was considerably influenced by Michael Angelo. If he had left the realm of art after painting only one picture, "The Funeral of Court Orgaz" he would have created an immortal niche for himself in the world's art gallery. Flourishing as he did about the end of the sixteenth century, this master painter combined in him the renaissance touch of Italy with the warmth of Spanish feeling and made his technique a perfect vehicle of expressing the two pivotal points of Spanish art, viz., blending of realism with spiritualism. And in this he succeeded and produced a perfect specimen of them. Those who have the eyes to judge say with full justice that in the history of art such a picture is unique. It was unparalleled in the past. A like of it may not be reproduced in the future. It brings out by a few touches of the brush the beauty and

restlessness of Spain's national character, her slippery ways and intense feelings. No Spanish artist has surpassed this Cretan in expressing the Spanish mind.

It is a wonder that one of the best portrait painters of the world, Velasquez, was comparatively little known before the nineteenth century. Yet he lived and flourished two hundred years earlier and with the touch of his brush created a new realm of beauty. Of all the pictures of Christ his one on the Cross is by all estimates the best. Art connoisseurs think that here was a master painter who had the power in him to vivify his portraits without the artful aid of imagination.

The picture 'Las Meninas' or the 'Family' has been acclaimed as one of the world's great pictures—the greatest perhaps in the portrait line. Here the artist is seen painting King Phillip IV and Queen Maria Anna. Behind the background and in its midst the subject matter has been so beautifully and proportionately laid that we feel as if we ourselves are in the artist's studio and watching him paint. In the far end of the canvas there is a touch of faint light and more faintly behind a window curtain are two rectangular spots of light. You see reflected there the King and the Queen just ready for a sitting. A fine combination of reality and imagination appears there in perfect symphony. The power, the restraint and the innate beauty the picture reflects make us imagine that the painter was a carefree artist. Sir Thomas Laurence characterised this picture as the "Art of philosophy"—because of the exact and virile representation of what the artist had conceived. Lucca Jordano was so exuberant in his praise of this picture that it is difficult to translate his description in another language. He epitomised it as "theology of painting."

Another master of the seventeenth century was the great painter, Murillo. His subject was also theological and as usual grew round the life of Christ. He transmuted into his subject such a depth of human feeling and a fund of inspiration that it was rare even among the Italian masters. In 'Prado' two pictures representing the Annunciation of Immaculate Conception are kept side by side, the originals of which are in the Louvre. One sees here the unique colour scheme of a Ribera, the mellowness of a Van Dyke and the living realism of a Velasquez all in one. It is apparent that the artist tried

his best to create an atmosphere of saintliness and heavenly environments around the anxious and the apprehensive Virgin. But the human instinct has triumphed and she represents not any extra-worldly expression or supernatural divinity, but a beautiful pure maiden with all the normal human feelings. Besides this the technique which Murillo adopted for rendering lifelike the huge crowd in his pictures has been accepted as without any parallel in the world.

Only another Spanish artist has during these centuries got world recognition. He is Goya, the father of the nineteenth and post-nineteenth century painting, who revived Spanish art and restored it to the world class. One hardly sees an equivalent of his portraits of the royal family. He has left in these pictures a searching and often relentless analysis of their character. He has depicted in canvas the story of a decadent court, its last days of glory. His brush also typified the best example of a nude picture. The world was almost a comic stage to him. He unravelled the contemporary 'inner Spain in a series of master pictures with a refreshingly brutal frankness or clothed them in grave humour.

Fortunately Spain had not been as ruthless on non-Catholic art as she had been on non-Catholic people. This is one of the reasons why the beautiful mixed art of the cathedrals of Salamanca and Seville still survive. Their appeal is more to the lover of art than to its student. The palace of Alcazar in Seville is a magnificent illustration. But Spain's dogmatic faith did not show the same consideration to Cordova's "Mezquita." Abdur Rahman's mosque was almost equal in stature and proportion to Rome's St. Peter's or Seville's Cathedral. This exquisite mosque rested on beautiful red and white arches inside which was superimposed a high pulpit and other Christian columns. Emperor Charles V is said to have remonstrated "You could have built elsewhere what you did here. You have destroyed an incomparable monument." We can only visualize what a grand spectacle it used to be when the war battered Moors would slowly and solemnly proceed in a prayerful mood to the gold and crystal laid 'mehrab' resplendent in the illumination of 4700 lamps filled with aromatic oil, shedding lustre and fragrance.

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Spain is the land of festivals. This is patent everywhere

in its varied scenes, artistic expression and pageantry of colour. This is true of operas also. One can still see the bizarre costumes of Mozart's Figaro or Don Giovanni or Rossini's *Barbier de Seville* or Bizet's *Carmen* in front of the second biggest cathedral of the world. Opera is neither a drama nor a song rehearsal. Yet the success of an opera depends on what it portrays through songs. They have a longer life but an opera can hardly wait for immortality. It is an expression of the moment and its value depends as an adjunct to dramatic fulfilment. On the other hand, unless there is an element of drama no opera can flourish merely on the strength of songs. An opera to be successful has to portray the colourful drama in a procession of men and women, their passions and prejudices along with songs which an appreciating audience is bound to admire with evident pleasure. For the average man and woman with no fine sense of music, the songs need not be of a high order. A colourful scene more than a nice discrimination of vocal music is likely to absorb the audience. This festive spirit in the life of Spain triumphs over the strict environment of Madrid, the restless commercialism of Barcelona and Valencia and the rumblings of revolution. This is more true of Seville than elsewhere. Those rustics who come to see bull fight as a matter of national interest or attend a carnival or a festival keep alive by their old rites the bright colourful scenes of the past, the quaint humours, the unsophisticated behaviour of the old historic sun-kissed Andalusia. Seville has a surfeit of festivities, particularly at Easter. There are still traces of Moorish influence in the serpentine bye-lanes. Even an ordinary eating place has a Moorish air about it. The broad boulevard, "Paseo de los Delicios" seems so unreal in this romantic atmosphere. It does not fall into line with the Arab merchant, the black-robed monk and the proud and pampered matadore.

A similar atmosphere pervades the Alhambra of Granada. In its grandeur and execution it reminds one of Shah Jehan's fort at Agra. But Alhambra is older. The ruthless imprint of time on its face attracts it more. There is no Moghul garden at Agra which would compare with the Generalife garden. This palace with its exquisite Moorish carvings and standing on a raised hill seems to stand by itself unattached to the rest

of Spain and forming no part of her. From its balconies one can see the huge panorama of a deep grey background with the snowy Sierra Nevada standing like an ever watchful guard. In the caves of the not distant hills which form its outer ring, live the gipsies as of old. They seem to fit in there. Everything else seems so unreal. Fortunately one has to climb up the stony parapets to get into Alhambra. It is almost a blessing that the loud electric hoot of a swanky car does not disturb the evening repose of Alhambra deep in its dreams.

In this setting, in an atmosphere of calm, you realize more than ever that in Spain's national character there is a mingling of thoughtless abandon and intense feeling. This makes one doubt whether Spain's republicanism or revolutionary tendency is a real expression of her corporate mind. When I see groups of men and women thronging and merry-making under the gentle shadow of the plane trees in Barcelona's ramblas I feel they are not the prototypes about whom Barcelona's papers shout. But there is one great thing here. You hardly see the artificiality of the Champs Elysee of Paris. They make friends with foreigners so easily. They feel no difference in atmosphere in the city's broad boulevard or the 'feria' at Valencia. Its streets glowing under the warmth of a nearly tropical sun, its orange groves shining in the daylight open their hearts to the stranger, and make him a friend. An artist friend accepted a small tribute in verse from this unknown foreigner in lieu of a copy of the picture of the Annunciation of Immaculate Conception.

You portray infinity through finite art,
A particle of the eternal,
We pay our tribute and sing our heart,
Sings of the beauty vernal.
You talk in silent voice through brush divine,
Your imagination inspires;
We see through ages with eyes serene,
Dreams light up desires.

THE DREAM OF SPAIN

Other countries of Europe have taken considerable pains to keep their past alive, but Spain lives in the past itself. Others present their past in a planned way not only to realise its significance in the present day context but also to attract as much tourist traffic as possible. Spain herself symbolises the protean magic of a vocal past and not merely its dumb expression. Therein she reveals, harmonizes her present and lays bare her soul which lies deep in the days long gone by. The Spain of yesterday, like her arts, exists to-day for her own sake and not as a specimen for exhibition. Till recent years she never felt anxious for tourists of other countries. This traffic began only two decades or so back. While others boast of such agencies for decades, "Patronato Nacional Del Turismo" is an organisation of the other day.

It is a pity that here in Spain the past is all powerful and wants to leave its impress on every expression of life. Even the very provinces whose amalgamation dates back as much as 400 years ago have hardly been reconciled to their unified existence. They are still anxious to undo what Phillip and Ferdinand did for the Spanish State. Phillip wanted to consolidate Spain into a theocratic state bound by religious ties. The provinces had to surrender their autonomy but did they forget or forgive? Like the Bourbons they did neither. They still cherish their tiny identities even in the bigger background of Spain and what the great Phillip did for her. The Catalan provinces are the worst. They are determined to keep alive their separate political identities. Anyone could see years ago that this dissension might hasten Spain's disruption. And it nearly did during the last civil war. What London and Paris mean to England and France Madrid never does to Spain. Barcelona, Seville, Valencia vie with each other and with Madrid in many respects. Barcelona is not merely the Bombay of Spain in political influence and pre-eminence. Her thoughts and deeds are wholly separatist. She is prepared to slight Madrid in any little way she can. So all is not said when we dub Madrid as the premier city of Spain. She is still a villa and not a 'ceudad'.

But this villa is worth the name. Its environs are so beautiful with hills and dales, flowers and foliage around that

for its parallel in Europe you have only to think of Vienna. Tradition has it that Vienna is bounded in the east by love, in the west by music, in the north by dance and in the south by song. Some such saying would befit Madrid also. It is veritably a city of beauty. When you see her in her glory from the slopes of the royal palace it becomes difficult to believe that you are in a small overcrowded town. The canvas of the horizon is so wide and so charming. Sauntering along Paseo del Prado's broad avenue I could hardly think that in the early 'thirties, with trade unions, labour movements and Communist ideologies galore, this was the most vociferous town in all Europe save the U.S.S.R. The military barracks are just outside the town. One may mistake the narrow streets for the streets of Calcutta's suburbs. Yet this city has a flare of its own, and is a veritable rest house for tired souls. Except in the bank area you do not find any modern haughtiness, modern craze for streamline and speed. There is hardly any need for these as well. There is restfulness in the very atmosphere. Even in an ordinary hotel you will find heaps of delicacies and eatables that would certainly cheer a glutton. Often did I feel that on this score at least I would have done well to be a student of the University of Madrid instead of London. Perhaps then I would not have thought that ringing out of the old year in the midnight of the thirtyfirst December and ringing in the new as is done in England is the best way of heralding the New Year. Amidst festoons and flags, amidst drink and dance and dream I could, in Madrid, visualize myself putting into my mouth full grown grapes of the finest vineyard, one each with every chime of the clock. Ring out the old and ring in the new.

The first expression of Europe's modern mind was in her attempt to know and find the world outside herself. In the vast panorama of the fifteenth century Europe's imagination the pivotal point was India. The discovery of India and in the process of that effort the discovery of America were the greatest contribution of the Iberian Peninsula to European culture. What it implies is best illustrated by the saying that the modern world is Europe's discovery par excellence and its greatest gift to humanity. Not that there was no vague idea of the New World before that. Theses have been written trying to prove that the Incas and the Aztecs, the Peruvians

and the Mexicans were settlers from the East, that sun worship and the solar mythology were but legends lent by India. One might even, if he were so inclined, take pains to trace the South American festivals resembling Ramlila and figures looking like Ganesha to Indian origin. This contact, even if there were any, has no practical significance today either from the geographical or the scientific point of view. The new world will continue to be remembered in the old as Spain's great contribution through Christopher Columbus' discovery. Spain and the Spaniards in that era were Europe's spearhead of adventure, advance guards and bearers of their olympic torch. In their new born enthusiasm, religious fervour and first flush of youth the world seemed to be an easy prey to them. They would rule over the seven seas, collect untold riches and become pioneers of empire building.' Though the Holy See's decree divided the new world between Spain and Portugal Spain had the whip hand. For sixty years she ruled Portugal herself. The whole of the Iberian Peninsula was hers and the whole of the New World in the name of 'O Crux Ave Unica Spera'.

Before England smashed her Armada Spain had been the prima donna of Europe. Those days are dead and gone but the people have not forgotten them. They still talk of the old, of the Spain that was, of the glory that was Spain. The magnanimous hospitality and royal courtesy of the common man in Spain befits a people with a world-wide empire. His tall talks do not seem to sound like the meaningless effrontery of the lowly. They remind you of the last wistful refrain of a long lost song.

Spain had never really developed a colour problem. The inhuman barbarities that were perpetrated against the Jews and the Moors through the Inquisition and otherwise were due to an imperialistic bigotry that made religion its handmaid and not to the pigment of the skin. Like France she threw open her army to the Africans and in law there was no bar to a non-Spaniard colonial becoming even the premier or the commander-in-chief. Spain still maintains a colonial army in her colonies. A non-white man may roam through the streets of any town in Spain without raising any undue curiosity or aggressive comment. Nobody would cavil at his making friends with a white girl or drinking and dancing with her.

Nobody would look askance or take that seriously. But this has been her problem as well. This close intermixture has not been without its evil effects either. It created in Latin America a race of half castes who inherited more of Spain's bad and elemental rather than good and refined qualities. One cannot make a sweeping statement regarding a whole nation, but one of the main reasons for Spain's downfall was its failure to preserve racial purity. The loss of her eastern empire can be primarily ascribed to this potent factor.

I never feel here that I am an unknown foreigner or an unwelcome guest. They take care to see that the *estranjero* does not feel neglected or is inconvenienced in any way. I still vividly remember the night at Salamanca on my arrival there. It was snowing heavily after midnight. It was rather impossible to go to the far-off hotel in the town. I took myself to the railway canteen and ordered a glass of strong black coffee. The proprietor of the canteen had retired for the night. So had his wife. But he not only gave me a hearty welcome but also awakened his wife. The worthy couple took the trouble of keeping me company throughout the rest of the night in spite of the lure of a warm bed. They gave me tips as to what to see in Salamanca, told the tales of their ancient land. I could appreciate their attitude. Here was a stranger interested in Salamanca, her life, her manners, her cathedrals, her university. Let him not go without a good impression of their beloved town. And how they tried to convince me!

This solicitousness seemed to be in the air. In Seville I chanced to come across a law student. Without my asking he became my self-appointed guide and companion, took me to the City International where an exhibition was being held, showed me the memorial tank in honour of Cervantes. We talked of Don Quixote and went together to the Alcazar palace. He even pressed me to come to his apartment and share his frugal meal. I felt really sorry that my country might not get an opportunity of reciprocating this hospitality. I also remember the long winding route along the olive-laden hills from Granada to Cordova and the hearty fellow passengers in the bus. How they differed from each other in culture, taste and social status. Yet irrespective of the levels from which they came they vied with each other in extending their welcome and courtesy to the stranger. I was almost overwhelmed with their kindness.

Here is another touching incident worth recalling. I was going from Valencia to Barcelona through that beautiful Spanish Riviera where mountains and waters meet by the side of the blue Mediterranean and its rugged rocky coast. I had hardly any idea that one of my fellow-passengers was a reputed singer of Barcelona. Suddenly he burst forth in song and I still seem to hear its breathful bass note and cadence—Oh 'Morena', Oh brown friend of mine.

Courtesy I have got often times in many lands but here was something added to it, the warmth of a hearth which hardly knows any barriers.

To Indians like us accustomed to express ourselves exuberantly, Spain's mental make up is understandable. Spaniards do not have the habit of suppressing their feelings with a curt 'That's all right' or an expansive 'sil vous plait' or 'merci Monsieur'. Nor do they give vent to an unpleasant truth on the pretext of allegiance to truth. They have in their social behaviour an undercurrent of genuine and dignified courtesy which is sure to please and attract the most sophisticated. Service with a smile is known almost all over Europe. In Spain add to that smile the warm sincerity of heart. Here scenery, weather and people vie with each other to give the *estranjero* that soothing feeling of relaxation and serene blissfulness which one must have to make the stay in a foreign land worthwhile. And yet that is not all. Spain's very atmosphere is such that in season and out of season I am reminded of my own land in another setting. The same old mule cart in a dingy dusty road, the same old crowd gesticulating furiously to explain its view point, the faint profile of a passing damsel, her shining black hair, her sportive eyes complete the picture and make you feel at home and in tune with your own land. It matters little that it is six thousand miles away. A single glance of Spain's deep dark eyes wipes out all this distance.

At every step I get ample proof of this nation's festive spirit. I doubt whether there is another nation in the wide world that accepts with good humour the old and the new alike in the matter of festivals. Our own country is a sad example. Due partly to western influence and partly to apathy we are fast losing our moorings. We look at the old festivals with disgust and disdain. We fail to capture their rapture. We do not accept the new imported ones either. We look at them

with distrust. The ballroom dance does not appeal to us in spite of its pleasing social values and the joy of sharing it with so many people. Nor would our society look back and begin to accept the ancient Indian dancing until Rabindranath Tagore brought about the cultural renaissance. Instances can be multiplied. The cinema and the soccer we have accepted. But they are not purely social expressions of a collective mind. Spain is more lively in this respect, more active. She does not discard old institutions and yet accepts new ones with good grace. Jazz is adored everywhere but the castanet is not neglected. Even the time honoured old bull-fight, cruel though it is according to modern standards, is still there in full glory with a slight modification in technique. Spain still feels elated at the name of 'toros'. Matadores still command respect in aristocratic quarters. The champion bull-fighter is socially comparable to a successful general. Spanish beauties still crash in for them galore.

Another such festival is the annual 'feria'. Spain almost resembles India in these fairs. Even the proverbial merry-go-round is there. Alongside dusty roads vendors sit and shout cramped with their wares. Life goes gala. A spirit of joy, an atmosphere of plenty and pleasure abounds in a rich measure. You could find, beautifully arranged, anything from old rare scents of Araby to carved Moorish knives—little tit bits that would make your imagination aflame with the fire and even fury of the middle ages.

Here one feels that life flows not so much in depth as in breadth. In the past women here did not progress much. There was no 'purdah' of course, but their lives were restricted and circumscribed in many respects except perhaps for the very poor or the very rich. Society obviously did not approve of too much progress for women. Stigma attached to female emancipation. But dancing in pair went forward and woman's life mingled in an even flow with that of man in the outer world.

Spain seems never to believe in doing things in moderation. What she takes fancy to she does in extremes. When she took up the ball dance she did it in excelsis. She turned it into an olympic contest. The dance that is so graceful and so charming becomes an endurance test with prizes for the couple who stand the strain most. Take the annual 'Marathon' dance.

This has become one of the biggest social hits of Madrid and I saw in it a practically national festival. Night after night amidst light, colour and music people would flock to dance halls. Each night is an Arabian night—a new tale told by a new Scheherazade in a new setting, with a new touch and a new excitement. Steps may flag, muscles relax and eyes droop, but on with the dance for a thousand hours. Here is a volatile race which would not care a tuppence for going to the extremes. That is in their blood. If *senoritas* are required to take part in the war effort they would not, as in England, take their places in offices or munition factories or in soft jobs. They would not immolate themselves en masse in fire as did Rajput women in India to escape the clutches of the conquering hordes. They would rather take part in actual warfare. Spanish *senoritas* have the strength to keep even sturdy men in trim.

Spaniards know how to endow the day to, day life with beauty and charm, that which we seek in imagination from our immature youth, in whose holy quest everyone of us everywhere saunters forth. Each day in Spain has its tale of magic, each day has its joyous recognition in life's free flow, in its simple but decent expression, in its imagery and detail. Even in the most ordinary hotel your menu will include ripe grapes which you can suck to the soft accompaniment of the guitar and throw your cares away. In the Moorish panels of the walls you will see a replica of Da Vinci or Titian's 'Last Supper'. Even the blue and gold table cloth might have an artistic history behind it. You might fall into a reverie and find that you are back amidst Alhambra's marbles or Alcazar's artistic environments. You may see in your mind's eye, flashed through the horizon, in the softening evening sunlight, the outline of Barcelona's palaces while the shadows of the plane trees deepen over the glens in a quiet repose.

This is just the season for Spain. Cold winds still blow. But spring is not far behind. In the sun-kissed orange groves colours change. But why should we go to a country when it is spring, when it is full of bloom and youth? In spring even a drab country would look gay and festive. To assess its possibilities one must see a land when it is about to blossom. That is the time when you can catch in a moment what it can give you in the near future. I am in love with these orange groves, these

half ripe fruits, this freshness of immaturity. I feel it in the earth, I feel it in the violet by a mossy stone half hidden from the eye, I sense it in every sprouting creeper. Perhaps that country does nowhere exist except in one's imagination. It may not be traced in the world's map but it certainly cannot be effaced from my dreams.

I feel the exotic exhilaration of Madeira even without fasting it. The orange groves by the blue waves of the Mediterranean near Valencia intoxicate me. I feel I am dissolving in ecstasy. I feel the joy of living and life becomes a lyric.

LA CHARMANTE EXOTIQUE

Sometime somewhere in our heart we feel an urge for the unknown, unattainable. By whatever name we may call it, adventure, wanderlust, grand passion are but expressions of the same urge in different spheres. That is why Homer writes *Odyssey*, Alexander sets out on conquest and troubadours sing for their unseen beloved. But in one way or other is found in them the same quest for what we have not got. Fair stranger. That is how I would like to put it. Fair because of allurements, stranger because of elusiveness. And yet that does not describe it in full.

My Europa is also a fair stranger. Fair beyond doubt, but was she ever a stranger? Perhaps not, so far as geography or physical existence, or even the manners and the mind of her people went. But there Europa does not end. She travels much further beyond in my mental horizon.

But a vague impersonal idea cannot hang by itself in the air. It takes an image and life at once consecrates it. It is this touch of the truth of life that makes ideas beautiful and adorable. This to my mind is the essence of romance, a quality that serves as a touchstone for all our dross. This element supplies

‘The light that never was on sea or land,’ and becomes

‘The consecration and the Poet’s dream.’

The object clothed with it need not necessarily be foreign. Actually whatever is different from our humdrum existence and lifts it above the daily drudgery has all the exotic beauty and romance if only one has the eyes and the heart for them. Have you not experienced suddenly of a quiet evening how your partner in life is a different person altogether, ten years of company and intimacy notwithstanding? A different person who answers all your romantic requirements? How does that happen?

To the super-sensitive this thirst for *la charmante exotique* is not a rare experience. It comes to him often, breaks through his daily life in melodies unheard and imperceptibly colours his horizon. Generally speaking an Indian youth is supersensitive by nature and reacts in a remarkable manner to the prospect of going abroad. Not like the young Briton with his calculated

plans for activity or adventure. The former does not belong to the race of empire builders.

It is this strange feeling, not frequent in the European youth, which makes a foreign country appear in a different light before an Oriental youth. He is not often properly understood, nor does he sometimes keep to his rails. I wonder in what light you will take Bananayake, a young student who, for the purpose of this episode, belongs to Ceylon under this name but who might as well belong to the South Sea Isles with all their tropical ardour.

Young Nuovo Monti was feeling cold in his digs in Madrid and indulging in memories of his warm home country. What a change for him. His orthodox parents had named him Navadwip Mahanti and brought him up in entirely Eastern surroundings. Actually his name had a touch of comic orthodoxy in his own country. Forget his identity, please. He is just one of those youngsters out from the tropics, keen on his studies, homesick occasionally and idealistic for ever. This story comes from him and throws a revealing spotlight on the ideas that go to make up our approach to *la charmante exotique*.

Monti was feeling cold and homesick when in came Bananayake, excited and impatient. The curly luxuriant hairs on his head were but the expression of the abundant life within. Fire and lightning used to play in his dark eyes, the cheerfulness of the tropical forest in his voice. And in his characteristic forceful way he was jeering at the romantic approach of the Oriental to his beloved. What tastier subject there could be for discussion in a cold private apartment of a young student? The *creme de la creme* of a young man's dream.

Bananayake was criticising the half-hearted effort of the traditional dreamer who always fails to meet the right girl when Monti, half in consolation and half in mockery, tapped his shoulders and said, "I hope you won't return to Ceylon with an empty heart."

You scratch a leopard and out comes his growls. You touch the tender heart of a lover and out comes his aggressive question, "What do you think of me?"

Monti just smiled and replied, "No, nothing much. But it is clear that you are thinking much."

There was a long silence in the room redeemed now and then only by the soft blast of the wind coming down through the fireplace and lighting up the room for a moment. The electric switch had not been turned on and as the room gradually warmed up the lilacs on the table began to give out their soft secret fragrance.

Bananayake slowly got up from his chair, warmed his hands for a while and took out a small lilac from the blue and gold vase and threw it into the coalbox.

Monti could understand the state of his friend's mind but did not break the silence. He noticed two drops of tear in his eyes shining like waterdrops on the petals of lotus flowers of India. Very quietly he pushed his own white handkerchief into Bananayake's hands.

This little touch of sympathy was the signal for more tears. Young Bananayake hid his face in his hands and placed them on the table. His strong frame shook in emotion.

In a voice moist with tears he disclosed, "Monti, I have received my home mail to-day."

There is nothing special in that. Home mail comes in every week. Monti understood that there was something special that evening. He said, "If you have no objection, you can come out with it."

"No, I have no objection. But not to-day please. Come to-morrow night at 12 o'clock to Puerta del Sol to celebrate the New Year. You will understand everything."

II

If you have not come to Puerta del Sol at midnight on the 31st December you have not seen Spain. The hullabaloo and exuberance of life we see in India on the day of the springtime 'holi' festival associated with the love of Radha and Krishna are repeated here at midnight in a European way. There is no riot of coloured dust or water thrown at one another to indicate warmth of heart. But what warmer expression of life there could be than the merry dancing, yes you may call it dancing, which accompanies the movement of the crowd at Puerta de Sol? At each stroke of the church bell one sweet grape goes into your mouth. Ring in the new. Wring in the juice of another delicious grape and welcome the New Year.

Monti despaired of finding his friend in this gay tumult of the crowd. He also began to wonder why of all places this was chosen as the venue for unravelling his life's secrets. He resisted the temptation of floating away with this crowd and giving himself up to its exuberance and began to prefer the prospect of getting under the soft eider down of his bed to the duty of carrying the burden of his overcoat.

He began to climb down the steps to the underground when he noticed Bananayake bidding good bye to a Spanish girl. Even in that moment of excitement his eyes were searching for somebody. Monti came within his view and the way he looked at him it was clear that he felt relieved.

Was it because Bananayake was able to show his Indian friend what an adorable girl friend he had? Monti began to wonder.

The two friends went into a restaurant. But the night was not a night for eating only. Dancing, hot and mad, was swirling the dancers from one year to another, leaving behind memories of pain and disappointments perhaps. The band was bidding good bye to the old and ushering in the New Year. It was coming into the life of the dancers in light cheerful steps, with confetti strewn all round.

Bananayake also drew very near Monti. He almost ignored the small table between them. The small glass of Madeira was held in his hand but his mind was too full to let him drink.

Monti said, "If I heard correctly that lady was calling you Buenos, wasn't she?"

He smiled very faintly and said, "Yes she was, but she does not know what an irony that is. Buenos means good but I have no honourable intention now."

Monti protested, "No, you were never a bad fellow."

Bananayake placed the glass aside and exclaimed, "Poor girl, she is dreaming of a home."

"You must have given her cause enough."

"Not exactly. But you know girls are ever ready to start dreaming in this line."

"Yes. And men are ever ready to tempt them into such dreams."

"You may say so. But do believe me, I never tempted

her. I was myself tempted to start dreaming, but did nothing to let her think of marriage."

Such personal conversations cannot continue in a restaurant and of all nights in a night like this.

Monti and Buenos started walking briskly along Paseo del Prado. Nobody to disturb them or to eavesdrop. The conversation that followed would reveal a situation in which may a young student from the East has found himself, not himself alone but together with a white girl, the girl of his golden dreams and not of daily life, *la charmante exotique*.

Monti began to comment on the situation. "I knew you to be a sport. You would get involved in affairs of the heart only for the fun of it and then get out of it. That is why I never asked you anything."

Buenos became rather mystic in his reply. He had never done anything so far which would require any explanation. In fact he had indulged in this game only to forget himself. Pressed further he replied that Monti would not understand these things as little Monti had seen life only through books and had not stepped out into life itself.

The retort came out like a flash. "You are busy watching the footsteps of friends dancing their way into your life."

Bananayake felt hurt and mildly protested. His self-defence lay in the philosophy of the ever new. In his life he had always invoked and loved the new. According to the astrologers of his country Saturn was in the house of his birth and Mercury was watching that house. So he must be always restless, always in search of new things and new ideas. From his childhood the West had fascinated him and he could not continue to love Rina either.

"Does she also belong to Ceylon?" asked Monti.

"Yes, she does. Like me she also was brought up among the tropical coconut groves by the sea side". Bananayake waxed eloquent in his description. In fact he became too oriental in his description to confine it within the cold matter-of-fact limits of modern English language. Her heartbeats used to dance to the tune of the waves of the sea. In her beauty was mirrored the charm of this earth of ours. And yet he could not be content with that. As soon as he came out West for higher studies he forgot her and his youth welcomed a new world.

Monti doubted the genuineness of his early love and tried to explain it away as an instance of calf love.

The night became colder. Bananayake pulled up the fur covered lapel of his overcoat round his neck and his low voiced monologue in that dead of night seemed to Monti to be coming from an almost different world.

Young Monti was still a student at Madrid when we met and I came to know of this intimate story of his friend. A strange story indeed but a story which had all the ring of truth and sincerity about it and which expressed a philosophy of life well worth an effort to understand. Monti had not outgrown the stage in which a story like this would create a deep impression and this helped me to recapture the spirit of it as faithfully as possible.

Bananayake was talking as if in a trance and Monti began to feel the Ceylonese girl very near him in a background of mist and flowers. He began to feel an undercurrent of tender sympathy for her.

The Ceylonese went on. "No, it was not calf love on my part. I loved her like a full-grown mature man of the world. But probably I shall never be able to love anybody for long. Why, I myself cannot explain. Nor can any body accuse me as a philanderer. But a heart unsatisfied always keeps me on the move."

Here Monti interrupted and said, "I think you are more moved to-day than usual."

Bana admitted, "Yes. I got a letter from Rina this morning. She is no longer the budding girl of my dreams. She is a flower in full bloom, fully conscious of herself. In a confident note she has written that I am rushing like a restless meteor without destination, but if I do wake up and try to find my feet I would realise that I am meant for her."

Monti enquired very softly, "What do you realise now?"

Very dispassionate was the reply, "I am set for the infinite. May be that I shall not reach it at all. May be I shall come across it but pass on without realising my good fortune."

Monti was full of assurance. "No, that won't happen. You will surely find out the supreme treasure at the right moment."

Bananayake was not so sure. "I do not know if I shall. But I am trying to realise myself in a new light.

He became agitated and gripped Monti's hand firmly. The force of his grip was as powerful as that of his confession. That very evening he had made a clean breast of his Rina episode to Madorina.

III

Young Navadwip Mahanti was dressing for the evening with particular care. His purse never permitted much in the way of luxury. Like most genuine students from India he had his monthly problem of balancing the budget. Remittances from home hardly left any margin for an occasional visit to the cinema or the dance hall. But he had all the same purchased a bottle of exotic perfume, supposed to be a scent of Arabia.

This would mean sacrificing lunch for at least a week. But there was no alternative. His friend Buenos had done an act of great hostility by inviting him to witness the marathon dance in company with Madorina.

Monti of course protested and tried to get out of the engagement.

He said that according to some Indian scriptures there should be no feminine company while out on street. But this excuse was not enough as Buenos replied that there were more humane scriptures as well which did not enjoin such self-torture and that in any case Monti was not to accompany a girl-friend in the streets. No attention would be diverted to him, nor would anybody have reason to feel jealous.

Monti had not anticipated such a reply and protested, "No, no, I did n't mean that. If at my age I sit through the marathon dance with a young lady I am likely to suffer from heart trouble."

But Buenos was not to be denied. He flashed back a crisp reply. Only those who have hearts need be afraid of such maladies. Monti had only one malady and that was the Madrid University. Even assuming that there was a risk, his parents at home must busy fixing up a home-made medicine. Who knew the right girl might have already been chosen for an arranged marriage.

But Monti went on arguing. Like Goldsmith's village schoolmaster, "though vanquished, he could argue still." He put in a very relevant query. The marathon dance was scheduled to continue for a thousand hours. If his mind were to take itself to one of the thousand and one nights of the Arabian Nights what would happen to the unfortunate country of his?

Buenos broke into riotous laughter. The mother country would be proud of such a son and welcome home a foreign bride, *la charmante exotique*.

To cut it short he disclosed that he had already booked seats for not only Madorina, her parents and brother but for Monti also. So there was no escape for our innocent friend.

Ricardo, husband of his landlady, had a keen eye and a keener sense of appreciation for these things. While Monti was dressing in his room, he was whistling a suggestive tune in the next room. That was intended to be complementary to the perfume released next door. To make matters worse he offered a carnation for Monti's button hole as he was coming out and predicted a sure conquest for the Indian invader. He blushed unnoticed, as a blush could hardly be noticed on tanned Indian complexion, and mildly replied that there was no question of conquest involved.

Ricardo went on smiling and said, "No, no. No conquest for you, you will be won over to-night. Good luck to you. Adios, adios."

Ricardo of course did not know that one of the nine emotions described by the Sanskrit grammarians was 'adi ros,' i.e. love (literally the primal emotion) and that his adios sounded like 'adi ros' to Monti who got more embarrassed at this good-humoured adieu.

As the noisy Madrid underground was bringing him near his destination thoughts of these two girls crowded in his mind. Was Bananayake between the two horns of a dilemma? This was not a case of Scylla and Charybdis as no danger was associated with either. The only question was happiness. Will his friend be happy with either? Probably not. His love was like the fleecy cloud above. It flies for the sake of flying. It is an art for him in its aesthetic sense. But as soon as the cloud seeks shelter on a hill top it dissolves into drops of water.

Rina or Madorina made no difference to him. Neither could claim the end of his quest for the unknown. What then?

The same problem went on tormenting Monti throughout the performance. Everybody was watching the dance, but not he. He was thinking of the struggle going on in the heart of his friend. The struggle between Rina and Madorina.

Suddenly Madorina's father became impatient of the heat in the auditorium. For him it was 'mucho calore.' Monti was bewildered and cried out, "What? In this January night?" Then he collected himself as the meaning of this heat wave dawned upon him. To give a realistic touch he started fanning himself with a silk handkerchief.

Madorina's mother followed suit. She whispered, "Let's go out. It's too warm here. Muchachas and muchachos of course won't mind the heat."

The dutiful husband became very concerned at his wife's discomfort and both left the auditorium.

Monti now felt it proper to feel very cold and to drag out Don along with him. But Don was a young fool still within his teens and refused to forgo the warm inspiration of the dances. It was a definite risk to fall in love with the sister of such a thick-headed youngster, felt Monti. The risk took a different shape later on, a shape not contemplated by Monti.

So he had to sit there between Don and Dori and began to feel unhappy. He became unhappy at the vision of a maiden from the tropics, warm-hearted and blooming into confident womanhood. The waves of the tropical seas murmur their soft whispers to her, the coconut groves supply a perennial inspiration to her. What chance has poor Madorina in a cold night like this against Rina whom Nature has endowed with so much? In whom will Buenos find his charmante exotique?

It was Buenos who broke this chain of thought. He called out somewhat abruptly, "Nuovo, you must be feeling cold. Go to the bar and order some madeira. Take Don also with you. We shall be there in a minute."

Nothing suited Monti better. He practically ran out of the vestibule with Don tightly in his grip. As if the mad bull was chasing the matadore.

IV

The marathon dance was in full swing. Monti never knew that he could dance, nor indeed did he possess the evening dress. But here was Senor Nuovo Monti in his boiled shirt and immaculate tail-coat dancing so well that some other dancers started clapping along with the spectators and lost their balance.

Senor Monti became very sorry. Indeed I could feel the depth of his disappointment at this sad interruption when he was describing to me the story of this exotic dream. He was so eloquent that he described this dance in dream as his maiden dance.

But then he really needed consolation for what followed. His sweet dream was broken by loud raps at the door and as he was hastily putting on the dressing gown Don asked him harshly to open the door quick.

Monti was worried. He had not found Buenos and Dori there in the auditorium on his return from the bar. He waited for them long, then he became happy at the inevitable conclusion which could be derived in the circumstances and straight went to bed after a long trek in that cold January night.

Then followed the dance in his dream and now what was it that danced in Don's hand? A sharp 'navajo', a Spanish institution by itself, specially in the hands of a hot headed Spaniard youth. But why this cruel joke on a non-violent Indian?

Monti tried to make light of the situation and to bring out a desperate smile. He enquired whether Don had missed the correct address.

But Don was not to be sidetracked. He rasped out and threatened dire consequences on both him and his friend. "Bring out that Satan incarnate"—shouted Don.

Monti tried to simulate courage and said, "Are you referring to Buenos? You know as well as I do that he and Dori were missing from the dance hall. Why, hasn't she returned?"

Don made violent faces and shouted again, "Has n't she returned? Ask the devil of your friend."

Monti realised that something had gone wrong. Still he improvised some consolation. "Go home and probably you will find them announcing their engagement by now".

Don's eyes were shining like the sharp long knife he held in his hand. "You cheat, rascallion, you are dreaming of engagement. You perfidious foreigners, you ought to take the place of our bulls in front of the matadores. Come forward for a bullfight. Come. Come."

Don hastily pulled up the bedsheet of Monti's still warm bed. The object was quite clear. He would make sport with Monti as the bull; he would spread out that sheet and sway it till Monti gets entangled and then kill him with that 'navajo'. And till then he shall be running from one end of the room to the other, a piteous little bird running from tree to tree in fruitless search of shelter. These thoughts maddened him.

What Monti was more afraid of was the loss of reputation. What would people think of him even if he escaped with his life? And what would happen if the news were to reach his parents in India through the grace of some well-wishers?

But Don gave him hardly any time to think. In mock heroic tone he shouted, "What are you thinking, Senor Monti? You don't want to pose as a bull? No? Or perhaps you are thinking that without two horns your outfit is not complete? All right. You can pick up two pen holders and fix them by your ears. They will look like horns. After all, I haven't got a sword either. Ha, ha!

This was more than what Monti could bear. He lost all control and was trying to do something, at least to pick up a fat volume of the Spanish dictionary and throw it at Don's navajo when footsteps were heard on the stairs. Light feminine footsteps.

But Monti would not save his life behind the skirt of a woman. Nor could Don deprive him of a heroic death. The latter ran to the door to close it from within but before he could do so Madorina, all dishevelled and panting and in tears, ran in.

V

The drama of Monti's friend reached the fifth act. As I was listening to it I was wondering in my mind whether it could with justice be taken as revealing in correct perspective the philosophy of young men in love. Romance in Europe has started wearing thin. Its exhilaration hardly moves young persons these days. The flutter of heart during the first love is there but the approach has changed. So has the reaction. Closer day to day contact has satiated the deeper mental urge. The veil of mystery has gone and with it has gone much of the old-world richness of romance.

But that is hardly true of girls of Madorina's age. In Europe girls still are more romantic than boys, more warm-hearted and greater dreamers of dreams. All glory to them. Some day they will revive the old values of life, those little charming facets which make life worth living and distinguish it from the life of worms and automatons. Modern youth in Europe is living through disillusionment while his counterpart in Asia is dying through it. None is happy, none at peace with the world. What is wrong with it? What is the *maladie du Siecle*?

When Mars is on the march it is not enough to forge new weapons of war and try to stop him. Vulcan can forge new instruments of destruction for both sides. And wars will take place. Nowhere has the call of humanity been able to stop the call to arms except probably once, and that in India. Emperor Asoka stopped the last war of his career when he realised the sanguinary aspect of it. Since then much more blood has, however, flown down the centuries. But has war stopped?

It will not. Nor on the other hand can we afford to live through the frustration, fear and barren days that engulf us from the waking hours right through our sleep. We, innocent individuals, may not shape the destiny of our states and therefore of our collective life. But need we surrender our individual existence also?

It is this individual existence in the midst of society which may yet supply the corrective for many of our mental ills. This will restore mental harmony and revive the values of our disintegrating life. Young men of Europe have lived through that disintegration in two World Wars. Nor have young

women escaped its harrowing horrors but still it is they who can save Europe. They will yet bring back to life stability, affection and even romance.

Madorina, the young anonymous girl whom I shall never see, seemed to me one of those human beings who make life what it ought to be. Her parents found her back at home alone and in tears. No amount of interrogation could bring forth any explanation and the old pair retired. But Don was a different proposition. He brought out the car from the garage and the navajo from his drawer and went out quietly. His intention was not pacific in any way.

But his sister's was. In spite of the traditional hot temper of the Spaniard she ran out and followed her brother in a taxi. This is very unusual for girls of her status and up-bringing but there are moments when love overlooks everything else. Save Buenos she must whatever wrong he may have done her.

Buenos was not in. His apartment was empty and his few belongings scattered here and there. Evidently he had left the place. What happened afterwards has already been told by Monti.

After seeing the brother and sister off Monti thought he must search out his friend who, for all he knew, might be on his way home. There was no non-European that night in the waiting room of the central railway station. So he took a taxi to the air port. And Buenos was there in the restaurant alone, with an unopened bottle in front.

Poor Buenos. A storm-tossed bird could have more peace of mind than this run-away from love. But he was surprised. Questioned by Monti he said he did not know why he was there.

Monti asked, "If you don't know why you are here, who would?"

Buenos said, "Does a man always know his own mind?"

Monti became more practical and asked him to come to brass tacks. "I don't want any of your philosophies. Tell me why you are running away, back to your country."

Buenos smiled sadly. No. He was not really running away to his own country. He was running away from his own mind.

Monti intervened and said, "No, you are flying away from

Dori. You have broken her heart and your promise to a respectable family. You, coward."

Buenos did not reply. Following his gaze Monti found that he was looking intently at the pale blue sapphire ring on his finger. In the East sapphire is traditionally associated with the supernatural forces of Saturn, the astrological planet of fickleness and restlessness.

Slowly Buenos replied, "It is better to break a dream at its beginning than when it has taken shape."

Monti got impatient. "Why should you think in terms of a break-up? You do not know how much Madorina loves you. She came to your digs and mine, alone and unchaperoned, just to save your life. Do you realise this can be done in this country only as a result of how much love?"

"Yes, I know. And that is why I have parted from her. It was my sacred duty."

"Very well done, Buenos. Let all lovers and husbands follow your noble example and start doing their duty by their wives and sweethearts." The ring of sarcasm was unmistakable in Monti's voice.

Two sad eyes rested on him in a motionless stare. There was deep unfathomable pain in them. Monti could not stand it and looked away, listening all the while.

"Why you alone, all respectable people all the world over will think ill of me to-day. I know that. Still I cannot blame myself. Why, I cannot explain. But if you can understand, some day you may explain to Madorina. That will be some consolation for me. As soon as I fell really in love with her, I felt that I had done her wrong".

Out came Monti with a retort, "Quite so. The jungles of Ceylon do not deserve a carnation".

"No, no, you have not understood. Ceylonese coconuts and Spanish oranges flourish equally well in my country. Why don't you understand, Monti, that I cannot cheat one whom I love?"

"That's why you jilted her?"

"Yes."

Monti grew more and more ruthless and almost snarled, "I suppose that is exactly why you deserted Rina also?"

There was no trace of hesitation in Buenos' voice. "Yes, exactly so. That is why I always dream of building a home

but get no port anywhere. The blue sky above is blue with my sadness but will never glow with my joy. I am mentally alone for ever and ever."

The touch of sadness in his voice touched Monti. He tried to console him, "You have had the great luck of being loved. Why don't you settle down now?"

The night was still dark but the faint advent of light gave it a mysterious touch. As if from another world came the reply, "That is not possible, Monti. I can never get my moorings anywhere. I have no journey's end. The girl of my dreams remains a dream. She is not a reality, she will never give me any rest from my quest".

Monti did not agree. He said, "Now you are talking like a theorist, a visionary. But neither Rina nor Madorina is a vision, a dream. Both are living realities, living truths. Rina's letter agitated you so much because her love was true. How else could you respond to it so much? Perhaps that is why you are going back home".

With a pause Monti continued, "I shall be happy if your quest for the fair stranger ends with Rina. Find her in Rina. I am sure Madorina also will be happy at that".

The smile on Buenos' lips was like the faint light that was suffusing the darkness now. He said, "From my early youth this call for the unknown has moved me. Both Rina and Madorina are to me but the same symbol of the unknown. No hope that I shall find my summum bonum in Rina".

Monti tried to assure him, "It may be so, but still she and you come from the same country and have been brought up in the same tradition and surroundings. Your day to day life in the atmosphere created by her will be so normal and natural that your psychological restlessness will not raise any storm in her daily existence. You must make a compromise. You must be content where you cannot attain something. You must have a quiet repose even when your mind is awake. That will be your victory over life".

Buenos hung his head down and replied, "That will be the victory of Rina over Madorina. Still the truth remains that whomever I may love and settle down in life with, the fair charmer from across the world will always send out her call and lure me. How to ignore her?"

"You need not ignore her at all. You are fortunate to have the vision of a greater universe in this earth itself. May your luck survive the hard realities of life".

With considerable doubt in his voice Buenos asked, "Do you call this luck? Sitting by the side of Madorina I used to dream of Rina. By Rina's side I shall feel Madorina's touch. What a defeat this means you won't understand, Monti."

Monti had no reply for some time. Still he must put up some convincing argument, must try to free his friend's mind from hesitations. The philosophy of love so often enunciated by Tagore came to his help and he gave him a masterly assurance.

"Why should you take it as a defeat? The south wind has come to your life with all its spring time inspiration. Why should you take it as the gift of one woman? You have not fallen in love with an individual. Your sweetheart is the dream girl who exists in all women. Her you discover in the girls you fall in love with. It is she who beckons to you from afar. But whoever she may be, it is her portrait which you must discover in a single girl. She does not belong to our world. But you can have your dream realised only in her. If you remember this you will find that your quest finds its fulfilment in Rina".

Suddenly the call came through the mike for all passengers bound for Paris. These two friends were so absorbed that they had not realised that the Pan American clipper was ready for its trip and passengers had arrived. With a roar the clipper started its engines, dashed out for the usual run and then gradually climbed up the sky, blue and infinite, where perhaps Bananayake first had his dream of la charmante exotique.

WHERE THE PAVEMENT ENDS AND BEYOND.

“Oh, to be in England
Now that April's there”

So wrote Browning in his *Home Thoughts from Abroad*. What would I, home sick and remembering my far away tropical land, write about the same April? Though used to Nature's spring-time extravagance in India, I must confess that I feel the same as the English poet. But there is something more than that. There is something different here, a change in the landscape, a great awakening, a renaissance of Nature.

April is round the corner. Her magic touch makes the countryside blush like a maiden blooming into womanhood. I wait expectantly for the morrow that will herald the new leaves in the withered branches of the elm. I feel the dawning day's rhythm in tune with the chimes of little birds in apple orchards. The air is astir and my mind responds. Every morning I search for a new flower, here, there, everywhere and note how colours change. People roam about in Epping Forest and Richmond Park in search of a late lark or an early cuckoo. If they are lucky to catch a faint echo, that would be the news of the day worth passing on to others. Newspapers will announce the event in bold head lines. Even in to-day's commercial England, this heralding of the spring in which our ancients revelled has a deep significance.

Here they see Nature with evident pleasure but not with an oriental poet's emotional abandon. The approach is different, the angle of vision dissimilar. They want to feel the spring in their everyday lives, in this very mundane being, in their very nerves and sinews and not in an unattainable poetic ecstasy untouched by hand. In March and April they begin their plans for hitch hiking. Swimming, yatching, surf riding, mountaineering, excursions, sports are but their joyous tributes to the merry spring. The mental stupor is gone. Life becomes a ceaseless activity. As flowers bloom plans mature. The human spirit is roused with the awakening of Nature, but it does not surrender itself in vain adulation. Nor is there any search in Nature for a replica of man's mental mood, a prototype of human emotions. In Europe the lover does not deco-

rate the beloved with flowers, flowers in her hands, flowers on her hair, flowers round her neck. At best she has the eyes of gazelle, the neck of a swan or lips like the red, red roses. There the poet of Europe would stop. He would not send her to the bridal chamber with the glamour of nature's ornaments only. His queen of hearts has enough chemical aids to beauty. She is not in need of lotus petals. Max Factor's Ashes of Roses will do for her.

I am reminded of an extract from my favourite ancient poet Kālidāsa. Nature's beauty contributes handsomely to the make-up of his sweetheart. "Gazelles have lent their glances to her. A shy quick gaze plays in her eyes. The beauty of the young moon is reflected on her face. Her long black tresses I find in the plumes of the peacock, the beauty of her eyebrows in the dancing ripples of the river, her swift moods in every gust of wind. But alas, nowhere do I see her all complete in one place".

Europe rarely accepts Nature as a mirror of human nature, as one sharing man's little loads of joy and sorrow. The primeval forests will not respond to the pangs of a new bride's separation from her royal husband in mournful numbers. The quiet woods will not resound with Rāma's grief for the loss of his queen Sitā or offer him consolation. Hills exist for life's outer expression only. They are places of pleasure and not pilgrimage. Here man decorates Nature according to his taste and enjoys her according to his needs but does not offer himself at her altar with complete self-effacement. He makes her acquaintance in every detail and not merely in broad outline. He approaches her with the exuberance of a conqueror and not the affection of a devotee.

One law of human dynamism is that progress retards in inverse ratio to the proximity of Nature. If you have enough you neither stir nor strain. Whenever one is fortunate enough to get something unasked for or in abundance, one unconsciously attaches less value to it. This is unfortunate no doubt but is deep ingrained in human nature. Such is the standard of our values. Mother's affection is there without the asking but we try hard to win the love of the beloved. The rugged world is for the brave. You have to fight, you have to defeat Nature in every round and wrest her secrets. In India we have the good fortune of Nature's plenty. This is perhaps one of the

main reasons why we are weak and indolent. In this enervating land of ours, amidst tropical bliss we carelessly multiply in tens of millions. We do not keep count of any other species beyond the human. The fate of even the *homo sapiens* hangs in the balance in this sub-continent. The thread of life is definitely slender and untimely deaths do not excite us. We may claim to be a race with spiritual moorings, but if the naked truth be told, birth and death have no spiritual significance for us and are taken for as granted and kept beyond human control in our mental survey. We feel that God is in His heaven and all is right with the world. What does it matter if hundreds and thousands of unwanted people see the light of the day and die in squalor and hunger? They will be done. Amen.

Here however there is hardly any such defeatist psychology. Here they revel in life. Even the tiny insects matter. Their lives and manners are observed and recorded. Every insignificant flower surrenders not only her thoughts too deep for tears but also her secrets of anatomy and physiology. Flowers too have their value in the scheme of things. Not only are their names known but their behaviour as well. Their place is assured in the realm of art and beauty. They have their objective recognition in their own right and not a subjective deification because they have arrested the fancy of a poet who has made them famous.

Why talk of flowers alone? Life here is one whole, a totality that has lustre and perfume. This thought is uppermost in my mind because I see around me happy faces, sturdy limbs and vibrant minds. The very footsteps of the people here ring with dynamism. Their very eyes reflect a dream fulfilled. Their very talks reveal a mind at work. I can almost nickname each one with a flower's name. I call a white pure face as Lily White, a budding youth as Snowdrop, a glamorous one as Rhododendron. You might, if you like, call him Snapdragon as well.

I am here in this eastern coast to enjoy the first youth of spring-time England. Away from the crowd and in my own way. That is why I am here at a small place which I think no Indian has so far graced with his presence. I feel I am one with Nature and free from all encumbrances, even from my own identity. I want to make friends with men and women I

never saw before and perhaps will never see in my life again. I want to talk heart to heart with them and feel their mental pulse. That is the way to come out of my own hard shell. Nobody will attack my inner identity. I drop my veneer. I gain in stature and yet retain the distance. The mask of convention disappears.

I find myself in a land of small camps. But each is placed at a respectful distance from others so as not to mar anybody's privacy or solitude. There are also abandoned tram cars for one to stay. None expects furnished apartments here. Nor need anybody ring at the closed door. One may be a young poet of twenty while his friend Matthew may have reached the Biblical three score years and ten. Does it matter? They both belong to the same age group in eternity's calendar and have nothing to hide from each other. Presently I find three young faces peeping out of my tent. They are having a game of hide and seek and my canvas seems to fit in exactly with their plans. They are staying in a tram car. Everybody in the camp knows these three little musketeers.

Here I find people from all ranks of life. They have temporarily left behind their separate identities for the time being. They smoothen their angularities and chasten their insularities. I meet here the romantic son of a blue-blooded aristocrat with that clerk from Camden Town. I speak and mix with both on equal terms. They themselves do so and cut jokes in a normal way. They do not forget that they are human beings first. I see in them neither aristocratic aloofness nor democratic flippancy. No one traces descent here from the Domesday Book or the Wars of the Roses. In the context of a blue sky and a broad sea and against the human background such considerations of caste and creed become meaningless. We shed for the moment our outer stamps. Snobs are snubbed. A narrow coterie is ruled out of court. Nature's law of gravitation comes into play and not her decree of conservation.

There are so many things to do after breakfast that one has to prepare a plan. There are so many ways of engaging oneself. Company and solitude both call me. Somewhere a soccer match is on. Other games also appeal. In the sun-kissed beaches young men and women are throwing coloured balls and slipping on the sand with gusto. Early swimmers

are riding on the surf. One semi-nude group goes to the sea with flutes and mouth organs. They are in a crowd. Over there in a sheltered nook someone is sunbathing alone. Tanned men or women become the cynosure of all eyes. Back at their work they will be noticed with a tinge of envy and appreciation. Here is one who has had his holiday. I see everywhere groups of sun-bathers. As the sun showers his warm rays for a few months only, every one seems to be anxious to store as much as possible of that solar grace in the bones and skin. A friend speculates on the quantum of sun-shine stored beneath my tan pigment so as to form the first line of resistance against the bitter cold of Europe. How else could I face it so cheerfully?

If so minded, the free lance can walk over the sandy beaches all alone. As little ripples touch his feet, he may conjure up the vision of Selkirk or Crusoe in quest of an unknown island in an uncharted sea, destination unknown. There may not be anyone around to mar the solitude. None need show solicitude either. A solitary smile may or may not greet him. Somebody may ask 'weary traveller, have you lost your way'.

This one question stirs me up.

When I feel I have lost my way, my imagination runs riot. I see an unfrequented rose-laden village path, a quiet inn by the wayside and the profile of a golden haired will-o-the wisp of a girl half-hidden from the eye when

Restless light,
Like expectations,
Vibrates on water. (Tagore),

One might in that mood turn one's back on the sea and its rumblings and return to the earth and the earthly scene. One may wend his way through apple orchards and feel pleasure in seeing accustomed scenes again. One will recall the warmth, beauty and rich cadence of the poetic delineation of rural England in literature. Each description is so specific that one can almost spot it out. They know how to feel with their hearts the grace and beauty of their land and to express it exactly.

Here is a specimen.

"Sweet William with his homely cottage smell

And stocks in fragrant blow,
 Roses that down the alleys shine afar
 And open Jasmine-muffled lattices,
 And groups under the dreaming garden trees
 And the full moon, and the white evening star''.

'Jasmine-muffled lattices' is just the touch that requires to make the picture real and live.

The everlasting motto of the Norfolk Broads is 'Let me sail with the wind and float', the favourite refrain of the lotus eaters of India. The Broads are the best place for water cruise. Yachts sail over placid waters and wind blows in harmony. Tall grasses and reeds touch me. I need only relax in a deck chair, read a book or look at the wide expanse or better still, close my eyes. I need not go to the shore for meals. One can have them in plenty from boats doing the catering business. One need not spoil his dreams by thinking of more mundane things. A sea gull, an old wind mill—these are enough to lend wings to your imagination. Here is a temporary solace for the tired nerves, for the man whom the worship of money gives no rest. One hardly finds a more potent balm. The one striking feature of this trip is an automatic discipline and at the same time the absence of conventions. Those rich people who come here have a special mental aptitude. By the standard of the charges here they could easily afford to go to fashionable watering places.

An Indian who comes here will certainly be reminded of the rural scene of Eastern Bengal. But these waters do not, unlike poor India, reflect the hopes and fears of a poor people and a still poorer peasantry. Memories of the marshy paddy fields of East Bengal came back to my mind. I cannot escape them. Those fields go completely under water and I ply my little boat through the shoots of corns that whisper a tale of the peasant's hope and fears, of the problem of his daily fare. But on the surface the same serene beauty is there, the same music of limpid waters. But the Broads lack a soft touch, that lent by a pair of love-birds to make a romantic setting. Tradition has it that these Indian birds stay together all day long by the river side only to part company in the evening. All night long they sing to each other with the river flowing between them and impart a tender touch to complete the pic-

ture of soft rushes and placid waters. I remember my East Bengal waters by way of contrast particularly when I do not feel the necessity of coming under the roof of the boat when the evening darkness throws a spell over this aimless wandering. I feel that I must accept in my heart not only the whole of this earth and this firmament, but also the sleepy dreamy moonlight in which these two meet where the horizon ends. If I fail, I cannot do justice to the magic of the daylight that plays on the Norfolk Broads.

I feel a yearning for spring time, a yearning which I cannot express in terms of words. Books remain open and the pages seem blank. I look vacantly at the new leaves on tree tops. The fading sunlight attracts me more than the powerful electric light that floods the library. In such an atmosphere it is almost a sin to think of examinations, a sacrilege. Nature lures me while studies call me. In this conflict between the heart and the head I find a way out. I enter into a compact. That is what I do. Five and half long days I surrender to Dame duty and the remainder of the week is devoted to the worship of Nature's beauty. I know my well-wishers back in India would be horror struck at this and would never approve of so much recreation. Thanks that I have none here to pull me up. I go on picnic on Saturdays. There is enough scope here for escapes which will suit every taste and every pocket. Such an investment is never barren. It pays good dividends. I feel more alert and mentally refreshed for more work for the rest of the week.

Some days I ride. I leave London by train. Aimlessly I get down somewhere. I hire a horse and move about in shaded paths. I feel I am aglow with youth in every fibre of my being. Somewhere off the beaten track perchance I meet a stranger. Sometimes the horse is my sole companion for the day. The silence of the woods seems weird. Sometimes we make a party and leave by car. We did arrange such an expedition to North Wales. Over the narrow winding roads up and down we went. There is no green foliage here. The rugged bare hills stare at us. But behind the moss-fringed stones countless flowers of different hues bloom. Mountainous Scotland and mountainous Wales differ. One is green and wild, the other bare but well dressed. Wales looks more civilised and certainly is less talkative.

My uneventful trips become frequent. Almost every week I trek out of London. A few miles off the suburb I cross by the tube or bus. In England a city is an octopus. All the village greens are coming within its tentacles. That is why a village here tends to be a pocket edition of the town. In my unplanned walks I come across hundred of villages whose tales no Goldsmith tells. They are essentially my own discoveries to be shared with no one else. A small duck-pond, a broad lake full of lilies, a village park by the side of a small rivulet, the spire of an old church, a Gothic carving, a Roman remnant—all delight me. In sober moments I might even laugh at myself for my precious discoveries but I, like Wordsworth, can not but feel, 'the joy of widest commonalty spread'.

I meet so many types of men. Some raise unpleasant topics too. A companion once starts discussion on Miss Mayo's slanderous book on India which Gandhiji dubbed as the report of a drain inspectress! I am reminded of the retorts we gave. But I ask, why malign? Each one of us has a skeleton in the cupboard. Do our guardians not become sleepless in the thought that vamps are sucking their immature wards? Sometimes the boys themselves behave foolishly and without any sense of decency or restraint. We must not and our guardians must not forget that most of the failings in our young students cannot be laid at the door of Europe's witches and England is not full of them. The social taboos and complexes in the midst of which we are brought up are primarily responsible. I ask in all seriousness how many of these flappers would like to sponge on Indian babies. The stories that reach the shores of India are more the exceptions than the rules. In some cases our boys, suddenly freed from the bonds of social tradition, personal taste and religious restraint act abnormally. On the other hand our very defects stare us in their stark nakedness and helplessness. Why should we criticise others when we know and feel that in our turn we still stick to many things for which others may legitimately criticise us? When we talk of our lofty spiritual heritage, do we think of the dead mass of unkind rituals in the cloak of which common man is cribbed, cabined and confined? Do we remember a society which often gives neither cheer nor solace, where indolence passes for spiritual activity, weakness puts on the cloak of forgiveness and fatalism justifies poverty and squalor?

Have we then as a race any moral right to criticise others? Rather it will do us a world of good to copy some of England's undisputed qualities of head and heart. We must remember the great precept that neither a nation nor an individual can become really great without a solid foundation of active moral principles. It matters little what particular shape it takes in different countries according to their tradition and national genius. We should not forget that a race with world-wide ramifications, with a glorious literature and an enviable record of scientific achievements and artistic talents is a race which has a sound basis. It is better to understand and to appreciate, than to cavile and criticise.

I spend one full holiday out for attending the annual session of the Indian Village Welfare Conference, a society established in England. But I am more interested in my mental uplift than in village uplift. Geographically the venue of the meeting is in a village but the place where we stay is an old mansion with all the essential comforts of modern town life. The session begins in beautiful surroundings. I wake up in the morning with the song of a thrush and I plan at once my escape for the day. I prepare myself to find a little brook, a big cow, a hefty farmer or a baby prattling from the branch of a tree. I feel at peace. I find that a mock hillock is being created nearby. It has a toy railway and an imitation tunnel. A boy can travel in that railway with a few pence as damages. Though I am a delegate here I do not feel much of an urge to attend the meetings. Rather I feel like playing the truant. I come across a group of community singers. True, they have neither the polish nor the flourish of a philharmonic orchestra but these songs coming straight from the hearts of the rustic singers and being in tune with Nature, charm me in that darkening evening. What if they have no purity of cadence or tutored technique? I envisage somewhere over the hills Wordsworth's Solitary Reaper listening to a call from the far-off Hebrides.

In return I am asked for Indian songs. I am sorry that I cannot entertain them. Our folk songs are dying. In the Indian countryside only the professionals or the specialists keep the art alive. Our hearts' songs seem to have died on the lips of rural India and the great renaissance that has taken

place under Tagore's influence is only gradually reaching the uneducated masses. My land is a land of sad humanity.

And so I feel my days in that Herefordshire village blossom in their fulness like an Indian lotus. The earth underneath is covered with flowers, flowers everywhere. The softness of daffodils soothes me. As I pass by village hedges birds sing and bushes smile. The subdued fragrance of gorse makes my nights sleepless, but a slumber hangs over me. In the depth of my sub-consciousness I hear

My whole universe
Calls me anon,
Calls me in silent voices,
Time after time it calls.

(*Tagore*).

THE SANCTUARY OF EUROPE

Painting has a poetry of its own.

I suddenly realised that as I came across a print of a painting in a London tube station. Just a young maiden, vibrating with life, with one foot aloft with a slant and the other on a skate floating through an ocean of ice. A pale moon behind her and a smile on her lips. Playfulness in her feet and a call to the unknown in her beckoning fingers.

“Grace of limbs, flowing and tender,
Suffuses the earth”.

sang the poet of the divine love of Radha and Krishna. That grace was flowing over the whole frame of this fair maid of the tourist advertisement. At the bottom was written, “Come with me to Switzerland”.

That call got mixed up with my dream.

We people of the tropics depend on the sun for planning our day's business. Bright light announces itself loudly in the early hours of the morning and very prompt is darkness to bid good-bye as if it had overslept by mistake. There is no long, gradual twilight in the plains of India. We hardly realise when the red sun turns yellow. We determine the time in our village life by looking at the sun. Many a simple fellow in far away villages would lift his finger to the sky and tell the time of a particular occurrence by showing where the sun was then. It is his clock, his maternal uncle in common parlance, who comes to the rescue by telling him the time.

But the beauty of a Swiss morning is totally different. Nor is it possible to tell the time by pointing at the sun or the quantity of its light. From early dawn to the very dusk, daylight dances on the snow with the same sparkle and you cannot tell the time by the daylight.

The blue of the sky here is not sullied by dull smoke. Not a speck of dust anywhere, nor a trace of soot. The ethereal beauty of the sky is not marred by the slightest film of invisibility. Clear and untainted is the atmosphere. The same clarity and liberty I can feel in my mind. As the dawn calls the sun starts peeping from behind a cliff in one corner. The crimson glow of his chariot tinges other snow-capped cliffs with the same dye and I remember the Indian spring time *holi* festival of coloured powder and water. These tint almost the

whole of the little world of your friends and dear ones for the moment and your heart wells out in pagan joy. So does my heart here when I notice the play of colour spread from one hill-top to another like the echo of music, the dance of waves, the perfume of flowers. All imperceptible but true, the magic of colour spreads from one point in this worldly space to another until it suffuses your own mind. When I wake up at the break of dawn I do not find any space sufficient for unrolling the ecstasy of my joy except the inviting sky of Switzerland.

In that wide, free sky my soul seemed to spread its wings and attain freedom. It started flying at will like a light-winged bird. It got itself lost in the music of the mountains. The Himalayas evoked in Tagore this feeling of music. It, he said, penetrated the sky in waves of the different musical scales from the portals of the dawn to the westerly nest of the evening in search of some message. What that message is the poet alone knows. But looking at the Alpine ranges I feel that the unheard music of that message would any moment strike up a note in my heart. Who knows, unable to bear the impact of the response, my heart may split up into atoms.

Why my mind only? The mind of humanity has attained liberty under this sky. The pages of history bear ample testimony. From time immemorial artists, orators, reformers and revolutionaries have sought refuge in this country. But for it, it would not have been easy for Calvin to evolve militant Protestantism. Grotius might not have got his inspiration for International law. It was here that Rousseau formulated his ideal of equality, fraternity and liberty. Mazzini gave shape to his dream of Young Italy in Switzerland. Even the other day it was this country where the seedling of the Russian revolution had to be nursed carefully away from the reach and wrath of the mighty Czar. How could Lenin, without the refuge of this land of liberty with its hills, forests and natural hideouts have matured his intrigues and principles? Without these was there any earthly chance of fighting successfully the far flung empire and the deep rooted imperialism of Russia?

This country is the eye-sore of the tyrant and the heaven of the hounded out. On the four boundaries stood different warring states. She came in contact but not conflict with each of them. Many a stage

of the evolution of political theory would not have been formed without the example of Swiss independence. But how much power-politics did she possess or play with? She is divided by three languages and thirteen cantons. But she has escaped civil war or international war century after century. It was in her bosom that Romain Rolland found shelter and preached internationalism when his own country forsook him because of her intense nationalism.

The world has produced the United Nations in place of the League of Nations but not another Geneva. I place Geneva above the capitals of all the countries in the world. Not that it is a big city. Nor does it roll in pomp or wealth. But it has saved the world from grievous loss by offering shelter to many a revolutionary in the realm of thought and politics. This town is what may be described as nonconformist. One has not to embrace any particular creed or join any party for obtaining refuge. When one has to run away from the wrath of the state there are only three places to choose from,—London, Paris and Geneva. London is complex in spite of catholicity, conservative in spite of liberality. Paris is too vast, too beautiful, too full of diversions. Geneva, however, is limited, tidy and self-possessed. In London the refugee may be converted to yet another creed that may be flourishing in the currents of free thought there. In Paris the Latin Quarters will breathe more of fine arts and free life than of the fight for freedom. But round Geneva stand the snow-capped cliffs with their hoary heads beckoning you to liberty. London does not believe in a new idea a day. Its politics has well laid-out channels of thought which overpower you from the outset. Behind Paris lies the tradition of ideas unlimited and theories undigested. They have dazzled the pages of history no doubt. But therein lies a handicap for the silent champion of a new cause. Geneva's tradition is the snow-capped Mont Blanc beyond Lake Lemman, which rears its head high above all tradition and history, for ever and ever. London and Paris are the gifts of man; Geneva of Nature.

Paradoxical it may sound but it is the story of a prisoner which shines brightly in the annals of this country of liberty. All visitors to Switzerland come to see the castle where lived in captivity Byron's Prisoner of Chillon. The country itself is the fit object of description by a warrior-poet like Byron. A

hero himself, he understood with sympathy how the spirit of the prisoner used to fly in the free sky and thus give the slip to the sentry on duty. That Byron was a poet one can easily realise during a trip to the castle by a steam launch across the lake. It seems that the bank this side is rushing along with the launch while the bank over there stands stationary with all its hills. The yonder landscape of snow and the foreground of sloping vineyards make pictures of villages stepping straight out of the canvas used by Durer, the painter of Switzerland.

Nature here supplies not only solace but also sustenance. In Amiel's Journal we get not only the influence of bitter cold but also the awakening of mind that winter produces. Even when Nature is bereft of her trappings of greenery and foliage mind does not cease to obtain its inspiration from her. The beauty of this country has given to many an intellectual treasures richer than food, life force more valued than existence itself. In Holbein's paintings we get an immense sense of coming face to face with life. No doubt the Jura mountains have supplied the colours to his palet and illumined his mind and creation. But for Jura many an artist would not have been born.

Beauty never palls if Nature herself remains full of life and imagination aids it. The beauty of Switzerland will never grow old. Man will never get tired of it. How can cold language describe the warm and colourful beauty of the deep green Swiss pastures? I can only quote a line from an English poem—

“The emerald green of leaf-encharmed beams”.

When the snow showers jasmine flowers on them I do not know what to do with them. Whether to put them into my mouth like a greedy girl or just to soothe my eyes at the sight of this spray of pearls and diamonds on the leaves. Fortunately the mind does not remain inane. It becomes full of verve and eager for expression. The magic touch of white endows the whole landscape with a language of its own.

Countless lakes stud this country. Each one has its own local colour and variety. Each one has a beauty of its own when the sun shines or the moon smiles. The shadow of mighty mountains and the spell of floating clouds create such a tremulous charm round the lakes that one hardly remembers

the flutter that passing steamers may have created on their placid bosoms. The quiet chalets on the banks look like fairy castles in slumber. I, however, prefer the smaller lakes. Most of them are much higher up, in inaccessible places where they come in sight with all the surprise of unexpectedness. Man's rude footsteps do not disturb their meditation. I can enjoy their beauty, but not enlarge on it.

I like Switzerland so much because of its mountains. Each cliff seems to be a symbol of the human soul, seems to carry its message high above this earth. The attraction of the plains is light and superficial, as if your love for them just rolls over and away without moorings anywhere. But the love for the stony undulating uplands puts towering caps on all the heights. This love flows in high waves, up and down and up again like the waves of the sea or the scales of music. Elevation calls the mind upwards—always and without rest. These snow-capped eminences are awake for ever, without break and untouched by sleep. Waiting for the climber, for you and for me.

Nature here is dreaming in snow. I regard Nature in this country as full of life. But the sense remains incomplete if this is taken only literally. Man himself has infused life in the image of Nature here and has got her blessings in turn. In this bitter cold all trees and open spaces are covered with snow, paths are disappearing under it, snow is coming down in showers and this heavenly gift is exhibited in the shape of icicles. Man receives this remorseless gift only for a few months in the year and must have his fill within this period. But he does not lag behind. He enriches the winter with his own enthusiasm. It is his rapture which captures the spirit of winter sports.

Many of the precipices are beyond the reach of the ordinary climber. But that has not stopped these people. The telepherique takes them up to the top. When this magic box leaves the mortals' terra firma and begins climbing through space with the help of only an electrified wire life itself seems to hang by a wire. But nobody worries. This race of eternal youth will dance and sing and enjoy at the top. Had they chosen to live in my country they would have driven away the monks meditating in the caves of the Himalayas to still farther secret recesses. The Everest might have escaped their con-

quering advances, but many ranges in the Himalayas would have become regular holiday resorts no doubt.

From the eminence where the earth seems to have come to an end I look round and what a mighty spectacle of snow-capped cliffs greets me. These are like the waves of a sea of snow. The ocean with its myriad waves seems to have been enchanted like a hydra into a fitful stupor. Its countless flowing heads are lying stationary at my feet. Who is the great charmer of this world, I ask myself softly.

As I gaze and gaze on this superb spectacle of wavy ranges suddenly a new vision takes shape before my mind. Can my ears capture the echoes of these rumbling waves? Can they? The secret genius of European music is mysteriously unravelled to me. Its harmonious resonance undulates from cliff to cliff and sweeps over the whole sky with its endless variety and infinite perception. The inner heart throb of European music finds expression in the resonance of a world-wide invisible orchestra. That of Indian music lies in the singular melody of an individual heart.

Nature here is red in tooth and claw. Here you cannot dally in love poems with the enervating breeze from the South Seas lulling you into indolent happiness. You have to wrest the joy of life from her unwilling hands. To protect himself from the ravages of the winter the Swiss himself has made his onslaught on winter by skating, ski-ing, romping and dancing on ice. The headline news of the morning is the amount of snowfall on a lake, the thickness of the crust of ice on a hill. The news of freezing is the warming news. One such good news sent me running to St. Cergue from Lausanne. Do you call this a winter sport? I call it the invocation of life. In it lies no supplication, but a sufficiency of self, a luxury of liveliness. There is sweetness in the spontaneous gift from a friendly hand but supreme satisfaction in the wresting of a prize from the enemy.

In the midst of so much expression of life one thing however is somewhat lacking. This enthusiasm does not seem to be lighted up with intellect. There is no sense of the infinity of spirit in this joy of life. This joy which enables one to float through a white dream. The European welcomes the spring with sea bathing and outdoor life, the winter with sports on ice. But it is only the quest of joy which leaves its

stamp on his face. He does not seem to take into account anything else. The truth of the matter is that the craving for good time one after another is bringing a deep change in the life of the ordinary man.

A Swiss young man, a typical educated middle class young man of his country, became a very good friend. I could easily surmise that some day he might establish his reputation as a thinker, a leader of thought. But light joys have claimed his attention more and given a different turn to his life. He is a young writer of some standing. But the time he can snatch for his leisure he prefers to spend at the seaside and not among books which could give him further knowledge and inspiration. He confessed that he could, if he wanted to, gather the loose ends of his thoughts in the depth of night and start thinking deeply, but the call of youth was the greater one. Everything else was less important. A lively man must needs enjoy life. He did not want to sacrifice too much in the long and tedious march to success. That sacrifice he would think of later on, any time in future. But this delicious dip in the lotus-lake of youth must not be sacrificed, must be availed of in this fleeting night of pleasure. The morrow of satiety does not take long to arrive. So why neglect today for the sake of to-morrow?

My friend smiled, sweetly and quoted an old pastoral English poem.

"What had my youth with ambition to do?

"Why lost I my Amynta, why lost I my vow?"

I could not deny the truth, the substance of his viewpoint. May be that the colourful pleasures of to-day may turn grey and uninspiring a few years later. But how can I blame one who wants to enjoy to the dregs the joys of this very moment? Who can say that the ecstasy of to-day is less precious than the success of to-morrow? Has not the Persian poet of pleasure sung.

"Why fret about to-morrow, if to-day be sweet?"

I would not bewail the lot of the mute inglorious Miltons round us, those who might have ripened into big somebodies but remained only raw nobodies. Intellect after all cannot be the common property of the masses. Neither in the egalitarian France nor even in the Communist Russia.

Europe, however, has plenty of people who quietly snatch,

themselves away from their chambers of serious life and seek temporary escape in the open spaces, sea side resorts and dance halls. After the necessary recuperation they return to their world leaving behind this life of light relaxation. In Indian national life, however, we do not get such a harmonious balance. Europe has before it two typical Indian characters, the mendicant and the maharaja. The only idea that the common man in European villages has about India relates to the bejewelled turban and the loin cloth. The middle class Indian in the ordinary habitual dress does not come within his ken.

This is not unnatural either. In my school days I heard the story of a rich and extravagant landlord who one grey mournful evening heard the call of a young girl, "Time is passing". It was not meant for him. Nor did the girl mean anything to him. But that simple saying was pregnant with religious ideas for him. He discovered a didactic lesson in it and renounced the world, for time was passing. Tarry he could not. Nor did he come back to his household even for once. Two distinctly different but typical characters of India left their reflection on my impressionable mind. The history of India too showed me only the rise and fall of dynasties and the advent and disappearance of religions as the most important events in the life of the country.

Later, on my way to Europe I looked closely at ourselves, young Indian students coming abroad. The bar was the bar before which they stood on their trial as men of independent will and judgement. The shadows of superiors did not lie across their path. Nor was available the shelter of the ivory tower of an affectionate family. What did I see on board the ship? As a rule we do not drink, but those of us who do often forget the limit. We do not get accustomed to the occasional social act of drinking for the sake of warm company and camaraderie. We are not used to the transparent joy found in an abundance of life. That is how the risk of going beyond the depth arises.

I looked at myself too. Not used to the European way of living, how would a young Indian behave himself in a world where individual liberty is not fettered, where the joys of living are yours for the asking? How would one, who preferred not to get down at Marseilles only for the sake of rolling on

the sickening waves of the Bay of Biscay, he able to adjust his whims and adventurous moods to a new world?

We in India do not ordinarily try to arrive at a compromise between enjoyment and renunciation. What we lack is a balanced harmony in our day to day existence.

When taking part in the winter sports in Switzerland I came across a fine example of the harmonious development of life in Europe. An elderly intellectual whom I know came here with the same objective. Here in this icy life he could not be distinguished from a cheerful youth. Back at the university he was never steeped in forbidding gravity like some sombre professors of Indian universities. But a glow of scholarliness always kept him at a distance from us. We knew and recognised that to us he was a friend but not a chum. But no Indian could conclude from his playful buoyancy among us here that he was a serious devotee in the temple of learning.

The light of Europe revealed us Indians as extremists by temperament.

* * * *

In this sanctuary of Europe one comes across a wide variety of people from different countries. But the most interesting are those who have made Switzerland famous. It is not as the habitat of the defunct League of Nations or the venue of so many international palavers or even the home of winter sports that the country has earned its place in the heart of man. The man in distress, in search of solace is the one whom I find difficult to overlook. Somehow I always manage to stumble upon him unconsciously. And Geneva is the town which, of all the capitals of Europe, has the largest number of them. Paris probably has a still larger number but I would not count the Russians who left their country with the fall of the Romanoffs as refugees who continuously float down the stream of politics as the floatsam and jetsam of life. In fact most of the Russian refugees did not leave their country for the sake of the political theory they hold dear to their hearts but for the change in the social and economic structure which Communism brought in its train.

Here in Geneva there are plenty of genuine refugees as well as psychological refugees. The latter are a peculiar class who are burdened with a luxury of grief. A very interesting

class no doubt which should form the subject of a psychologist's study. Here I came across one of the this type who years ago was an Indian, in fact one from my part of the country. Beneath his present rugged exterior and delicate frame once surged the glow of sturdy youth and daring adventure. Once, when he was a young Indian cut adrift from home and left entirely on his own.

I cannot resist the temptation of narrating the true story of that Indian boy and a Russian girl. It illustrates the difference in the ideas and outlook of an Indian and a European. The very approach to the problem of life is different, the essential similarity of human emotions all the world over notwithstanding.

The illustration is perhaps not very apt. Russia has one foot in Europe and the other in Asia. Her people represent varied and diverse elements of humanity. That makes the story all the more interesting, however. The complexities which go to make the Russian character, the different streams of thought which contribute to its formation are not very familiar to the rest of Europe. Not to India either.

And yet the Russian horizon is not so different from the Indian. Asiatic ideas and introspection permeate Russia, or at least its eastern fringes. And this cannot but tinge the western heart of the vast country. Russia has never been properly understood by Europe. Probably India would fare better, given the time and the opportunity.

Sonia had the complexion and the warmth of the sun in her. The sun that sparkles on the Black Sea lit up her body with a glow not found in the snow-white of Russian complexion. The golden Volga streamed through her hair and Senski would describe her in the passionate language of the mediaeval Bengal poets of the divine love of Radha and Krishna, a perennial source of inspiration to poets all over India, as

"A lightning steady, of golden hue".

Svarna Moy Sen, that was the original name of Senski, now a refugee in Geneva. His people in far away Bengal have forgotten him. So has this adventurer also forgotten them in course of time. A voluntary exile from India from the age of twenty his main assets were a pale complexion and a slightly Mongolian appearance. Sen passed off as a Chinese Russian, thanks to the world-wide familiarity with the name of Dr. Sun

Yet Sen. Over thirty years back he was in the pay of a foreign legation at Moscow. "Which dance hall and which theatre did not know Senski in the Moscow of 1917?" he asked in a mood of contemplation. Gently I nodded approval and he continued his reminiscence.

That Saturday night at Hotel Metrople was steeped in revelry. Small hanging balconies ringed the ballroom. In between them could be seen cabinets where rumble and roudet played fast and loose and champagne and charmers fared well. A Pole was leading the orchestra on the dais. Those days in Russia none but a foreigner was thought much of as an artist.

Art too fared similarly. Gipsy music was swooning away in the hall while Senski was tasting an expensive caviare on hot bread carved in the shape of a flower basket. In tune with the sad music the lights were dim and jewels sparkled like fireflies. Beautiful women all round, their soft fragrance and lissome figures, wine mellow like music and music clating like wine, and caviare spread out in front—this was the heaven Svarna Moy Sen was in. He closed his eyes in sweet contemplation when rang out revolver shots followed by the shrill cries of a dying reveller. Followed the inevitable military top boots bearing down in heavy tread all the moaning music of the evening.

Not a new situation for the Moscow of 1917. The police and the military started their usual round of searches. Severe and frightful in the case of the average citizen, these were nominal for the elite. As a member of a foreign legation Senski got off without any interrogation. But a golden girl did not.

Hers was the only case in which no respectable title or reasonable cause for the presence there could be produced. Senski had seen her sitting at the next table, with the looks of a shy deer and the sparkle of a far-away star in the sky. Actually he was thinking of piercing through her defence of aloof loneliness and putting her wise about the secret pleasures of this earthly evening. But a film of delicacy stood in the way. The girl was too innocent, too ethereal for the purpose.

But now cold Siberia started in the face of this warm complexioned girl. Nobody had been caught as the plausible political assassin. But somebody must pay for the sin. Here was a girl hardly out of her teens, living on a University

scholarship in a scheduled hostel. Why was she here, in this hotel of all places, in this evening of all evenings? Who would believe it was youthful curiosity that had brought her out here, just for an experience in escapade? A Saturday night at the Hotel Metropole would mean a lifetime of experience. Instead was coming exposure followed by expulsion from the university, if not exile to Siberia.

But like the young dawn of hope and cheer came Senski to her rescue. His cash and connections were adequate for the purpose.

The roseate hue of the young dawn lit up these two young lives.

The story of the following days is one that happens in some lucky lives. Sonia used to go to the college and Senski to the legation. At the end of the day reunion would come like the rainbow with all its phantoms of joy and colours. None felt the difference in race, or temperament. Love is a balm, a blessing. But to what extent?

Light was fast receding under the window of Senski's flat in Geneva as his story was unfolding itself to me. I went on listening. The reunion of the afternoons fast faded in the approaching gloaming and the time was too short for expansive hearts. Quick footsteps brought them to restaurants, operas and dance halls, but fleeting time would give them hardly much chance.

The only long spell was in the Saturday afternoons when Senski had no office and Sonia no classes. One such Saturday they went out of the town to hear gipsy music. Their troika seemed not to be treading on this earth.

They went inside a huge crystal palace. Snow covered it heavily outside but tropical palms were on display inside. What an oriental atmosphere. The Western touch was there also in the shape of the leaping log-fire in the open fire place. Round it was assembled all the audience. Four gipsy men in coloured trousers and white brocade blouses and four gipsy women with coloured silken shawls on the head came gyrating with the principal singer. Charochka was served in tall glasses. As soon as the singer came right in front the contents must be finished in one sip and in one breath and the glass turned over to show that not a drop had been left unfinished.

But Senski's thoughts were wondering away. The gipsies

were singing in plaintive voices full of primal tenderness and primitive melancholy. The song was expressing all the pathos of frustrated humanity—quite characteristic of the Slavs. But they took away Senski's thoughts somewhere else. He was having a feeling that his friendship with Sonia that began with a quest for pleasure would one day end in the same sad tune in which the gipsies were singing there. With defeats on the frontiers and food shortage and discontent within, the state was about to founder. If that did come to pass there would be no escape for anybody. All would sink at the same time.

Verily, thought Senski, Russia is a country of melancholy moods. Much more than even India in bondage. Russians feel sadness from the very birth just as we feel lethargy. Both tend to produce a morbidity, a drowsiness of mind which however should not overpower Senski in his happy circumstances. The presence of Sonia should fill him with sunny warmth. She was a cupful of cheery wine. Neither Russian sadness nor Indian stupor should be there for either Sonia or Senski.

But he came under the grip of sadness as soon as he fell in love and began to realise that Sonia also was in love. That Saturday evening he came out of the town to throw away this spell of sadness in an exotic atmosphere of song and dance and cheer. Gipsies were charging charochka in quick succession and serving up music without break. Everybody was drunk with both. Gay abandon was the keynote of the night. Spree was in the air.

Inside was heavy with the warmth of the atmosphere. Quietly Sonia and Senski went outside and lolled by the little lake outside the gipsy palace. A cold damp breeze was gently awakening both joy and sadness in Senski when she lightly took up his right hand and asked, "Why are you thinking so much this evening?"

"No, I am not thinking".

"What are you doing then?"

whispered Sonia. "Are you so spellbound with gipsy music? I thought there are plenty of gipsies in your part and their song is not strange to you".

"But I am not a Mongolian Russian, dear. I am an Indian. My home is in Calcutta".

Sonia gave a sweet smile. "Senski, that's the latest joke of yours. You are pulling my leg. But you must n't forget

that I have seen Tagore's portrait. If you are his countryman then I too shall pick up a new country as my own".

Senski protested vigorously. "No, Sonia darling, listen. In this wandering life of mine I have often taken shelter behind lies. A war is on and if it is known that I am an Indian I shall lose my job. But I must not lie to you. I am Indian, not Russian".

Silence enveloped Sonia. The still waters of the lake too were silent. Only the bloodstream in Senski's heart rushed on madly, eagerly for some words from her lips.

It was he who had to break the silence. "Sonia, sunny darling, has my country put up a barrier between us"?

There was no reply. Only the moonlight went on weaving magic spells of unbroken sadness through the tall firs flanking their return journey. He called her again. But there was no response.

He felt that somehow the song had ended. The golden string of the lyre had snapped. Questions, frantic questions would be useless. Russian mind is enigmatic, beyond comprehension. Why else would she become so devoid of feelings just at a small discovery?

They came back together in the troika. He scoured heaven and earth, but could not guess any reason. Was Sonia hating the foreigner in him? Was an Indian more foreign to a Russian than a Mongolian?

A whole week passed in silence. With a heavy heart Senski would count the days. He would come back straight from the office and wait for the post. But all in vain. Tired of waiting for the whole evening he would put on red cossack pyjamas with black borders and go to bed early. He had never read poems of love, not having felt their need. Now when he did, alas, love was dyeing his horizon with a sad sunset glow.

Amour propre also came into the picture. If Sonia were to give him up just for his nationality, let her do so. It was after all a disclosure of truth. Love is not love if it cannot stand the light of truth. If Russian love melts like snow at the first touch of truth, oh, that cold lifeless love is not for an Indian.

But alas amour propre is no armour against love. Its winged arrows are not so frail, nor so powerless. Senski began to think of the possibility of Sonia's illness after that nocturnal

adventure and could not but pick up the telephone and arrange a meeting.

A fine opportunity presented itself. A colleague in the legation, Vassili, was going to spend a week-end with his family in a dacha outside the city. Sonia had been introduced to the Vassilis. A mild hint did the trick. The young lovers were invited for the week-end.

They took advantage of the sympathy of the Vassilis who went out for a long walk leaving them behind when burst out a violent storm. Sonia and Senski were all by themselves. None had broached the affair of that gipsy evening. They had had no suitable opportunity either. Senski had to break the ice. But a little prologue was desirable. There might be a rift in the lute.

Two small birds had taken shelter in the room. They were precariously perched near the hanging mirror on the wall seeking each other's company.

Senski pointed them out to Sonia, "Look, sunny, they have quarrelled. They are hitting each other with their beaks in front of the mirror and drawing aside".

Sonia laughed and replied, "No, Senski. You are probably thinking of the birds of Moseovy. But these are foresters. They are just billing each other, like doves".

"But, then, why are they retiring from the mirror?"

"Bah, don't they feel shy? They are getting shocked at their own behaviour and yet coming together again".

These words meant hope and courage for Senski. In a plaintive tone he said, "This stormy night we too have taken refuge here like those birds. We too are storm-tossed. But my sunny bird does not come near".

"Who says that she had drawn aside"?

"Then why did you keep mum"?

"Bah, don't I have to think"?

"And don't I have to share the thinking"?

"But everything can't be shared".

"Thoughts can be. You didn't even ask me how I spent these long days."

Sonia was a Russian out and out. She smiled the complaint away. "Those long days are long past. I know what you were doing. Probably you took up a volume of Pushkin

for the first time. I am almost afraid you would start quoting,

“When you’re away, I yawn and mope;
When you are here, I ache and pine;
I recognise by every sign
I’ve lost my heart beyond all hope”.

Senski was peeved. “Stop this subject of how I passed my time. You must have been very happy that the trouble was away and settled down to your books. Oh, you scholar. I can quite find that out the way you are cheerfully quoting a love poem”.

Sonia felt sorry. But there was more sympathy than sorrow in her voice. She said, “You don’t understand, Senski. There is darkness all round. Darkness has enveloped our country. A revolution will overtake our state, our society. There is no escape. Nor any hope or ray of light anywhere”.

The storm outside grew violent. Thunders burst over the sky of Moscow. Lightning played fireworks over the blue and gold dome of Kremlin far away. Sonia drew her chair near Senski. They felt very close to each other.

She continued, “You probably know that every young and thinking person in Russia to-day is a revolutionary at heart. We want to do away with this Government, with its injustice, oppression and corruption. We are losing heavily in the battlefields. Even our middle class cannot get a meal of kasha (rice and meat curry). Why? Just because of this cankered fossil of the state and the social system. Your legation must be knowing everything”.

There was a small pause.

Sonia took a deep breath and started, “Look, lightning is playing all round the dome of the Kremlin. This very moment our party men are carrying on propaganda. They are telling people that this thunder and lightning indicate what will strike the Czar’s empire.

Senski replied, “I know everything, darling. My job keeps me neutral, but I felt that these were upsetting you. Whom would they not? But have you actually joined Lenin’s party”?

A pair of eyes shone steadfast in that darkish room like Venus in the sky. She said, “Yes, recently. And now I feel

I have pained you by accepting your love. We must have to separate''.

Senski's eyes stirred with emotion. He did not know what to say. A dumb numbness possessed him.

Sonia went on, ''I had thought of converting you to our creed. But then you might have to lose your job. Besides you are a foreigner and won't believe in this secret mission. Alas, your path and mine are not the same''.

That was true, Senski told me with conviction in his shaking voice as he went on with his reminiscence. He was a daring adventurer, even a desperado at times, but never a believer in secret assassinations. There was an element of selectiveness and aristocracy in him. Nihilism could not be his line. Sonia became desperate because of her love while he was temperate because of it. She was facing ruin. He wanted to save her.

He said, ''Now I understand why you became so silent at the disclosure of my nationality. But what of that? Your creed is not meant for Russia alone. You want to carry it all over the world. So even if I don't belong to your party I can get your love. We shall be as we are. You will love me as you are now''.

Sonia smiled in reply. A smile sad no doubt but full of character.

''That can't be done, Senski dear. It's not possible to love me and not belong to my party. Our people will take you as a Czarist spy or an enemy agent. Nor can I allow you to enrol as a Leninist when you don't believe in the creed. No. That won't be fair to you either''.

Faith firm as a rock and fair as the morning sun lighted up Sonia's face.

That light brought new hope to Senski also. Ardently he volunteered to enrol in the party. Then there would be no difficulty.

With tight lips Sonia went on thinking and shook her head, ''That won't do. I love you and my love won't permit its own abuse. I know you love me but not my creed or methods''.

''Then will our love be over here, in this way''? Pain and defeat rang through his deep voice.

Senski was not prepared for the reply he got. We Indians have evolved a philosophy of the next world, of the life beyond.

That philosophy helps us to transcend the senses and sublimate all our desires and ambitions, and even unrequited love. That philosophy lends sweetness to union and consolation to separation. The Sanskrit poet also says that while in union the sweetheart is but one embodiment, in separation she permeates the whole universe.

But Russian character is made of a different stuff of which Sonia was but a lively expression. She fell in love in the natural vigorous fulfilment of that theory. She could not have found her root in Indian soil.

She replied, "I have read many poems of Tagore in Russian. I have also noticed how your mind is in tune with his philosophy. Of course I did not so long know why. For heaven's sake, please do not take offence or feel unhappy. With a very unbiassed mind I say that we are not of the same world. You walk with the head in the sky and we with the feet on the earth. We both walk, but our destinations are different".

There was a maddening sadness in his voice as Senski remonstrated, "No, no, sunny dear, our destination cannot be different. This storm, this revolution of to-day will come to an end, but our destiny lies together. You continue to love and I to hope. Let that be our sheet anchor in these stormy days".

Thunders roared past and a lightning flashed by lighting up her face for a moment. Tears were rolling down her cheeks. And Senski? People in the legation knew him to be a man of stone with a stony heart, stone that now melted like butter.

Sonia went on, "You must have realised by now that I belong to the earth. My love too. Though it does warm up when afire. I cannot find any consolation in waiting indefinitely for love to fulfil itself".

She took up his hands in hers and implored, "Don't you understand, Senski dear, that I want to drink to the dregs from my cup of love and desire. I want to have my lover not only in my heart, but also in my home. Not only as a lover but as a husband also.

Senski was desperate. He said, "So do I. I too want to have a home, here, in this country, with you. Be my wife".

"No. No. It can't be done. I want a comrade in my husband. You are not the one who can stand by my side with

his conscience clear. Nor is there any time to change your ideals. Clouds have gathered. Thunders are growing. The storm will burst very soon".

Senski of course knew that. But how soon nobody knew. Not even Czar Nicholas II himself. The Vassillis came back and there was no further conversation between the two. Had the Vassillis got an inkling of it Sonia would have been an imperial guest at No. 11 Lubiauka without delay. The Choka of Moscow were very active those days.

The very next day Senski had to go out of Moscow on an assignment. He had just the time to telephone Sonia that he was going and hoping to meet her again. The first rush of the impending storm tossed his heart. The first rumble of thunder was echoing there.

Yes. They met again for certain. Within seven days Senski received orders of immediate return to Moscow. The Czar had abdicated and the revolutionaries were forming a new Government. Reaching the legation he was confronted with orders to leave the country at once. The specially marked men had no room there. Board the ready motor van they must. He wanted to resign and stay back. But his prayer could not be granted. Security of the rest demanded his removal right away.

Outside on the roads streams of moving humanity were washing away before them the authority established for centuries. Forty thousand soldiers of the Revolution were proclaiming the victory and marching against the red background of the Kremlin. The Red Square outside which from the days of Ivan the Terrible to the May day of the Bolsheviks had witnessed oppression untold now saw the upsurge of the oppressed. Behind the soldiers marched the army of revolutionaries, students, clerks, lawyers and leaders of thought in the city. All were waving their hats in joy. The pride of success and the success of ideal lit up their faces. But Senski's eyes were looking out for something else. Where, oh, where was Sonia? She had assured him of meeting again.

Yes, they met again for certain. The march of the comrades was nearly over. So was the hope of seeing her again. An unbearable pain lay heavy on Senski's heart when suddenly somebody slipped in the crowd. Others pulled her up and put her on her legs but these were reluctant to move. Probably

she wanted to draw somebody's attention or was too excited to retain her foothold. Her two shining eyes, eyes like the evening star, got fixed on Senski. Next moment the daughter of the earth was on the march again towards her heaven on earth. A cry was coming out of Senski's heart but his companions in the 'bus shut up his mouth. He had to sit down without a murmur. The security of the companions was much more valuable than a call to an individual's sweetheart.

That day neither lightning nor thunder played in the sky of Moscow. The glow of sunset was looking lovelier against the red walls of the Red Square. The golden hair of Sonia, like the golden streams of the Volga, danced and danced in rhyme with the march and disappeared in the crowd, bringing home to Senski the difference between India and Russia.

THE ETERNITY OF GERMANY

Between the World Wars there was but a gap of twenty years when Germany, like the Phoenix of old mythology, created itself out of ashes of the first World War. Dame Providence tempted the fatherland with the old wine in a new bottle. The burly sixfooter succumbed to the temptation. But what a life and what a fall! Paradise was gained and lost and the famous Nuremberg trial was the last scene in the five-act drama.

The impression of that period is an interesting tale worth chronicling. In it there is plenty of food for thought about the future of Europe. That Germany was in spate was apparent to everyone who had the good fortune of visiting Germany then even for a short period. There was a hectic stir, a quick pulsation, a feeling of buoyancy everywhere. It was the gorgeous advent of an Indian summer, the melting of ice in polar regions. All indications of helplessness disappeared. The very sense of humiliation of her defeat in the first World War was forcibly wiped off from her face. New hope, new youth, new spring were surging up in the nation's life. The Rhineland expedition, the return of the Saar to the German fold, the brave violation, one after another, of the terms of the treaty of Versailles, the Anschluss, the rape of Austria and Czecho-Slovakia all acted as tonics on the national mind. A cult of German invincibility gradually grew up. In the Munich museum there is a statue of the Greek god Satyr relaxing in repose. The people of Munich would often compare their land with that prostrate figure and point out, "Germany was sleeping so long. But that did not mean that her iron muscles had softened." It was the re-awakening of the war-god after a fitful slumber.

Europe's life is dynamic. Her eyes are turned more on the future than on the past. Her movement is from glory to glory. Yet in many countries there is a sneaking regard for the past, a yearning for reviving it. The tourist also sees more of the past than of the present, of the things that are dead than of the possibilities of the future. But not so in Germany. The one thing that prominently struck a foreigner travelling in Germany during that period was the emphasis on the Germany that was being reborn. All eyes were to the front. It was the

era of a torrent that swept not only the fields but also the minds. The country went delirious about its present and its future. The rush for the march forward knew no bounds and like an Indian river in spate carried with it many destructive features.

The historic Cathedral of Cologne stands as a landmark in Germany's history, one of its great glories. But the glory of Cologne that day was not the temple of faith or the perfumed water but its famous centre of the Brown Shirt Movement. A Nazi leader was coming that day to see the boy scout parade. On both sides of the streets lined women filled with joy and pride and old men with surprise and approbation. Flags waved, festoons fluttered, Nazi salutes filled the view. The many-spired Cathedral stood silent sphinx-like, bereft of its devotees. It could not impart its solemn peace, the sacred solemnity of its interior to the frenzied public outside. The din of propaganda subdued the deep chanting inside. Ave Maria yielded to Heil Hitler and the Cross to the Swastika.

Germany's history has, curiously enough, always been the story of her individuals. Her philosophy, her attitude towards life tell us of supermen. The fatherland has often been in stupor and shame. But whenever there has been a resurgence, it has centred round a particular man. At the cross-roads of history her chronicle has been written by such outstanding men and her destiny reshaped. Such men were Luther, Frederick, Bismark, Hitler. Nowhere in any other country has the fate of a nation been so moulded by an individual. The German ideology found fulfilment not in democracy, but in an individual who gave shape to it. It was Luther who was the soul of the Protestant movement. It was Frederick who sowed the seed of Prussianism. Bismark was the sponsor of the Eagle's imperial wings. The third Reich was the embodiment of Hitler's dream. German national life emerged from time to time as the sudden flowering of an individual and not as the natural growth of a collective entity.

It was impossible then to think of Germany without this new apostle of her resurgent life. His meteoric rise to Fuhrership was through sweat and tears, dogma and determination, struggle and suppression. But the Nazis knew no other methods. They thought that for a country divided and disgraced as Germany then was there was no other appointed way.

They could not envisage any other swift and sure means to re-establish the country's honour and prestige so soon.

The Nazi Party had begun their first coupe in an humble way. It was possible at that time to suppress the Munich putsch. But the Beer Cellar movement continued. The place where the first Nazi fell became a place of pilgrimage for all Germany. A perpetual fire was kept lit there. Every passer-by had to give a Nazi salute when passing by that road. The world is aware of the persistent persecution of the Jews and the Socialists, how they were expelled, how religion and literature were controlled, how the non-Nazis were kept in prisons and concentration camps without trial. Germany had threatened the peace of Europe many times before the actual war. In spite of this debit record, the average German citizen would not hesitate to extend his warm welcome to these men. The path of no revolution in this world was strewn with roses. France and Russia are the two best examples. The French began their revolution one hundred and fifty years ago and the Russians only three decades ago. Many international synods have sat since then preaching a gospel of fraternity and internationalism. But have they succeeded? The toxin still vitiates the blood. Human nature remains unchanged.

Germany had unique faith in her own power. This was a complex from which she never recovered. This super egoism put her back on the world's chess board in the 'thirties. It was a thundering come back. She tried hard to keep up the stolen thunder. Take the case of sports and games. There was no denying the German thoroughness in organisation. It was a matter of wonder and apprehension in other countries. Germany's progressive performance in the olympic games led one to believe that no other country would be able to compete with her in the future. Physical exercise was a prominent subject in the school curriculum. In the university stage physical fitness was a prime test before the grant of a degree.

There was no doubt that in the pre-war Nazi Germany people used to look at things with deep human understanding, tinged though it was with their particular outlook. To be fair to them, in spite of the peculiar colour of their ideologies they did not consider the Fatherland merely as a geographical unit, but a living organisation. They made themselves familiar with every part of the country, its hills and dales, its rivers and

seasides. The greatest globe trotter almost confined himself to his country. In the days of ample cars, wonderful auto-bahns and swift aeroplanes the youth of Germany was seeing every nook and corner of the land on foot. The cult of 'Wander-vogel' first got going here. It was later copied by the British in the Youth Hostel Movement. One can hardly appreciate the deep human values and the pleasure that such tramping was bound to ensure in comparison with other methods of locomotion unless he himself has been on the road. I have been and I know.

But there is a difference between hiking in England and in Germany. In England sheer mental exhilaration drew me to the windswept sea beaches, to the Highlands, to the Hebrides and to the Lake districts. The green soft touch of nature, the silent solemnity of the star-lit sky, the mute grandeur of the bare hills would take one away from the world and its labyrinth of politics. One is hardly reminded of more mundane things while wondering about among the Derbyshire boulders in the faint light of a pale moon when mystery deepens and the evening stars call. But in Germany there would hardly be time to be in raptures over these ethereal feelings. The new dispensation strictly defined even that portion of the Alps which would be open to the German tourist. Every member of the Hitler Youth Movement had to take a solemn vow that he or she would wage relentless war on indolence, selfishness, wastefulness and defeatism. That was one of the reasons why even on the placid waters of the Rhine or in some quiet corner of the country the German youth could not forget that from his very birth he was dedicated to the Fatherland. Associations and clubs had been formed to develop strength through joy. The idea was to give a lead to the workers to spend their holidays and leisure in profitable and joyous pursuits which would develop them physically as well as mentally. This development of power and conservation of energy was the great ideal of German 'Kultur' whether in the human or in the mechanical field. But this power worship became a red rag to the foreigner. He saw in it an invitation to war. The Indian sacred scriptures say that the soul remains beyond the reach of the weak. Germany seemed to give a twist to this saying of the Upanishads. The soul she was worshipping was the spirit

of Mars. She thought that the greatness of a nation and its future lay only that way.

As a matter of fact this cult turned into a conviction. It affected the philosophical expression of the German mind. Too much of philosophy and culture of the mind was considered responsible for the country's downfall. The new generation therefore turned its thought to the other extreme. It laid an over-emphasis on physical uplift. It thought that mental culture should confine itself to that part the practical application of which would enrich the country with the gifts of science. Let there be no interest in pacific Christianity, no Jewish interpretation of internationalism. Let woman go back to her quiet nest, look after the home and breed sturdy children for the Fatherland. That was her obvious duty before anything else. She had no business to add to the crowd of wage earners and compete with males. Her salvation did not lie that way. The clock of the progress of woman's emancipation was put back. Even the Bible had an authorised version eulogising only those portions which glorified physical fitness. These were re-interpreted with commendation. Munich's Brown House was the Bethlehem of the Germany of the 'thirties, Hitler's *Mein Kampf* the new Bible.

And yet I defeated Hitler.

* * * *

Yes. An Indian youth did defeat Hitler once in his own way. Strange and student-like way. Unconnected with the war drums and the dance of death with which the world came to be acquainted soon.

Hitler had come to power and I to Germany. He went in state processions amidst fanfares and was greeted by the mad millions. I walked alone in state galleries, amidst fine arts and literature and was greeted by the mute mother Nature. He was noticed by everybody while I noticed everybody. He was the world's study. The world was my study.

Naturally enough I won. But it was in a more concrete and worldly way than that. Though it was only a young Indian who came into conflict with the little corporal, by then transformed into the Fuhrer by dint of superlative genius which had a gifted race at its command.

This conflict was however not of the type with which he was so completely associated in later years, nor was the arena

in the battlefields of France or Russia. We elashed, but did not measure our swords. It was a battle of wits.

The gentle reader may never have lost himself as a tourist in the wilds of Germany. But I did. And I did lose my heart to the beautiful Rhine, the sparkling waters of which used to weave legends in the past and wear the colours of romance in all ages. The Rhine dances its way through the most picturesque part of the country, meandering at places, surging at others but everywhere carrying her beauty unimpaired. Mountain fortresses stud her banks on both sides; some of them come down right into the water, stowing their mysteries into the waves of the river. All have their individual legends, these silent witnesses of many a tale of heroism, of lost hopes and broken hearts.

That Rhine was calling me. Indeed it has called me since my school days. Once after hearing one of the Rhine legends I wanted to fly on the wings of imagination, to accompany the young prince to Lorelei on the Rhine where the siren sings and enchants all boatmen to beckon them to death. I now wanted to see those rocks. I had no fear of being disillusioned, being sure of the natural beauty of the Lorelei rocks. It is this beauty which even now reminds us of the fair charmer and may lead the unwary boatman to an unwanted end. I longed to see the place from the river itself and decided to have a whole day's steamer trip on the river.

As in every country, a meal on a steamer or railway train in Germany is more expensive and the food not too plentiful. So I wanted to have a hearty early lunch before boarding the steamer. It was a quiet Sunday and there were not many people in the restaurant. Those who were apparently had other things to busy themselves with in addition to food. I could nevertheless feel their curious but stolen glances at me, just a foreigner obviously taking a trip on the Rhine.

With a flourish of fingers I went through the day's menu card and approved of the first item, soup. Nice and hot soup should be a good preliminary to a trip on the river. With so much cool water around I could do with a little appetising hot water inside me. The prospect of sausages with red cabbages put a keener edge to my appetite. After all a hungry hiker needs must have an adequate and solid meal. My rucksack, the unfailing royal insignia of a member of the Youth Hostel

Movement, called Wander Vogel in Germany, I carried on my back, my few changes of clothes on tour being its only treasured possession. It put the seal of approval on my natural desire for a square meal.

So I started with the soup. The restaurant seemed not only decent but also aristocratic. The waiter brought steaming hot soup in a beautiful bowl big enough for the usual table for four diners. Ah, luxury indeed. I took my share on the soup plate and took it tastily. Comfort almost closed my eyes. Satisfaction was in the air. I began to contemplate. The crackle of top boots receded from the pavements outside, though the steaming bowl seemed to take the shape of the giant of the Arabian Nights awaiting my orders to transport me to a better world. Ah, sweet contemplation.

The soft swish of a pencil dispelled my dream and the burly waiter was courteously presenting the bill. What? My eyes became wide and my mouth tight. What atrocity? The reign of law was still there. I had not yet finished my meal; three more courses still to go and here came the bill. To add insult to injury the bill was for the whole meal. I was on the point of losing my restraint and bursting out into what I consider my inimitable Hindi, the prospective lingua franca of my country. But the surroundings suggested a gentler course, particularly as the whole restaurant seemed to be eyeing me. I almost began to feel amusement lurking in the corners of their eyes and a sort of tolerating sympathy in those of the waiter. No, I must first ask for an explanation.

This was a Hitler Sonntag, a Hungry Sunday on which one had to pay for the full meal in a restaurant and be satisfied with only one course of his choice, the profits going to the winter relief fund. My choice was the soup and the courteous waiter could not possibly be impudent enough to point out this well respected rule to Herr Customer. Herr Customer is always right, but what could the humble waiter do in the circumstances? The Fuhrer's orders were clear. In other words I must pay up. This is what *inter alia* Hitler stands for, I began to think.

An Indian student at bay.

He is called upon to fill many roles on different occasions, from carrying chairs for speakers in roadside meetings to passing examination with the help of "made easy" note-books.

But this was an entirely new situation calling for a quick analysis and a quicker execution. Right in front stood the six feet tall waiter personifying Hitler himself. Young India must exert himself now.

Ahead lay the prospect of an appetising steamer trip together with a feast of natural beauty. But imagination, like soldiers, cannot march on an empty stomach. There was no time to find out another moderate-priced cafe. Nor were my means sufficient for an expensive lunch on board the steamer. Something must be done right now and right here. Right ho! Hitler.

"All right", I said, "I did not bear in mind your well respected rules; but then, you have not given me bread either. Soup alone cannot constitute a course. You must bring me bread".

The waiter readily agreed and placing a whole loaf on my table withdrew to his corner. The interested eyes round me retired to their respective business and quietly I proceeded to gorge the whole bowl of soup, enough for four people, together with that big loaf. Shocked protests were of no avail. I won't listen to anything. I was within the letter of the law and the spirit of it had not violated either. The law did not ask one to go hungry. All it asked me to do is to take not more than one course though paying for the whole meal. Both the law and the stomach were satisfied and, highly pleased with myself, I marched aboard the steamer leaving behind the Fuhrer and the fumbling observer of his law.

Sufficient heroism for a raw youth of twentyone. As the steamer ploughed through the Rhine weaving fantastic patterns of silver behind its trail my imagination began to play up this affair into a victory, an almost epic victory of wits. I felt lighthearted and in my exuberance thought that the rest of non-Nazi Germany should take its cue from me. After all I have defeated one law of his, haven't I? The affair began to assume a disproportionately big significance. The invigorating airs of the Rhine might have been responsible for this.

From Cologne's stormy Brown Shirt procession it was a great change to go to Coblenz in a steamer on the Rhine. A newly married couple was on their honeymoon trip. The French wife and the German husband were talking in each other's language. Some one was sipping the incomparable German coffee which they alone know how to concoct. A few people were singing in a mild undertone. German language

is however peculiar. In written words it looks sombre and full of consonants. In male voice it sounds rough and metallic but from feminine lips it bursts forth in streams of music.

In Rothenburg's walled town, however, one felt that he was away from the Germany of those days. Even a hundred years ago there were anarchy and lawlessness here. Kings of Prussia and other Electors had their eyes on this tiny principality. Centuries have seen scrambles for power here. Whenever the ruler was weak or circumstances favourable the big neighbours had no scruples to have it within their folds. This town still bears these marks of rapacity. The rocky castle, the moats, the subterranean prison, the alms hall, the lyre of the princess still lying there served to recapture a vision of the middle ages. Fortunately as the evening was quietly spreading its crimson mantle on the valley the Hitler youths did not fan out in military formation to violate the serene silence of the landscape.

Another such haven of peace was the Goethe House in Frankfurt. A narrow shady lane, sausage shops and dark shadows recreate the old atmosphere in whose surroundings Goethe lived and died, all the time passionately yearning for light, more light.

It was a gala night in a little hamlet on the Bavarian Alps. People from far off places had come there in this folk festival. Smiling maidens in their peculiar Alpine dresses were exchanging courtesies with one and all, known and unknown, touching their beer glasses with cordial greetings. Each one had a fair share of the famous German sausage and hoiled red cabbage. They looked happy and content. There was an intense feeling of joy. Community songs were sung and there were dance along with the band. Hearts were sparkling like wine. In the midst of this life and laughter entered a group of Brown Shirts. Their uniform, the sound of their military top boots seemed an anachronism in those peaceful surroundings. I felt as if a sweet dream was getting trodden under those creaking military boots. The maidens, however, welcomed them with open arms. They had a soft corner in their hearts for them. These Brown Shirts were the Brahmins of Germany for whom fair maidens put on their Sunday smiles and old mothers fried an extra sausage. Since the dawn of civilisation none but the brave has deserved the fair.

Coming back from that fairy land in that magic night I asked myself a simple question... which Germany would survive and find a place in eternity? The Germany of countless Rhine legends, resonant with the music of Beethoven and Wagner, replete with the treasures of Goethe and Schiller or the Germany of Frederiek, Bismark and Hitler?

Who would answer?

* * * *

I had not to wait long for the reply. I was not the jesting pilate who stayed not for an answer. I got mine on the way. Somehow or other I had strayed away from the beaten track. There was hardly any reason to do so. Sign posts were there, but I had missed them. I was perhaps too engrossed with what I had seen that night and the train of thought it brought forth. And I had aimlessly gone into the interior of the forest. Suddenly I noticed that I was not on the right track. The old landmarks were there, footprints on the sands of time and I could of course trace my course back. But deep in the subconscious a voice gave a message of cheer and courage: why retrace your steps, oh, you wayfarer of the new age. Like the history of this country ceaselessly marching, get along, on and on. Surely few of us care to retrace the trodden path. The world is for those who march along new routes, sail over seas uncharted, face unknown adventures. That is the cult of the Youth. Drink deep the rich red wine of Youth and march ahead. Germany had this idea ingrained in her national consciousness from her Nordic ancestry. From the days of the Vikings she had aspired to be the centre, indeed the storm centre if need be, of Europe. To her that was the ideal. The history of the Holy Roman Empire which was neither holy, nor Roman nor an empire, was but a faint attempt of the group mind to express itself in terms which the medieval age understood. Yet it had the seeds of a "Wellesehung".

Martin Luther's Protestant movement was another fruitful expression of this restless consciousness. Outwardly of course it was defined as a protest against the alleged corrosive influence of a corrupt church, yet in its essence it was an attempt not merely at reformation but at recreation also. It gave Europe a new thought and a new path. It created a new power and a new forum. Europe may forget the bloody trails of Attila but not Martin Luther's new dispensation. It led to

tremendous upheavals in the life of the state and the individual. But which big affair in the world is not accompanied by reactions? Every rose has its thorns, every movement its own unrest.

This cult of advance found expression in art and literature as well, in Goethe, Schiller and others. Even in the life time of these heroes of Classicism which was sweeping the whole world of literature Romanticism was born and reared its head buoyantly. It brought in the Romantic Revival and suffused the horizon with new tints not all of which would brook restraint. Thus the void that was inevitable in the English literature after Shakespeare or in Bengali after Tagore was not felt in Germany after Goethe. In the history of German literature the passing away of a master does not leave us at the edge of a precipice, but creates a new one to take us to yet another ridge. Long before the glimmer of Goethe could fade out from the horizon had appeared the glory of Heine. He was not merely the bard of exquisite love lyrics, but the expressive symbol of the suffering and struggle of that age. He delineated it in so many diverse ways. Heine had seen contemporary France revol in liberty of thought, he had seen her salons and cafes, the license of her artists, unconventional poets and authors. He came to the conclusion that it was not always wise to ignore the moral conventions of the late Romantic Germany's upsurge, and her cravings were that way for light, more light and even for lightning flash.

That was the inspiration of German philosophy too. Kant and Leibnitz, Hegel and Schopenhauer and Nietzsche carried it forward. Their philosophy did, it can be argued, some damage to mankind by fostering aggressive spirit. But aggression too lights up the path of progress.

In the dreamland of music, in its endless variety of genius, Germany lives eternally. She speaks to the whole world in a language which has affinity with the soul. My question was answered when I heard a faint echo of a Beethoven sonata in that forest where I had lost my way. I knew that human habitation was near by and felt assured in that cold forlorn forest that the eternity of Germany outlives all the roar of the cannon and the bomber. Where the soul comes into the picture no politics enters. Far above the din of war and politics Germany sits enthroned in the heart of man for ever and ever.

THE WORLD'S SWEETHEART

The cafes of Paris abut right on the boulevard of life.

The whole life of Paris seems to be epitomised there and one can get an almost complete and connected picture of it. Poets, artists, students, pleasure seekers, people wanting to snatch an hour of rest, common men and women, everyone flock in there and spend some time. One can join in the crowd, join in any discussion or dissertation, hunt up new faces, make acquaintances. If one is not inclined that way he can enter unannounced and exit unnoticed. It is so easy to adjust oneself to these surroundings. Bills are not presented as soon as you have your last sip of coffee. There would no polite hint to vacate your chair. If one wishes to celebrate the end of a careworn day and the ushering in of a fresh night, here is the place for that. There is no reason to be afraid that it won't be 'à la mode'. To a foreigner that is the right way to celebrate. The cafe is a national institution of France. Her life's main spring is here. She radiates from here, expresses herself.

Let me see life's carnival from here. A Yankee from the States, rich beyond measure, sees Paris as the world's first pavilion of pleasure where dreams and desires mingle. A student from Nippon is here to study Mathematics in this Mecca of Mathematics. I meet a Peruvian young man. He is learning painting. I do not know the rest. But I notice a bejewelled turban. I am afraid it may represent a petty Highness from India. At least the flappers may think so. I am glad I am not of the turbanned variety. My people have in their wisdom discarded it. I feel that the high priest here should be Bacchus. Da Vinci's picture of the god of carousal on the wall would add a realistic touch to the scene.

What a colourful pageant! I sit and look at the world in microcosm. Almost every nation is represented here, every age and every type. One can study their dresses, manners, customs, and even idiosyncracies. Some look with wonder, some with evident dissatisfaction. A few laugh while a few are so blasé that nothing interests them. These cafes attract like the Lorelei of the old on the Rhine. One has to submit to her call. One who does not has not met real Paris. If one says he has

not been to a café people will either disbelieve him or think that the fellow has never been to Paris.

One rarely comes across the historic home of the Englishman in London. Yet Englishmen and Anglicism are so very marked and prominent everywhere that we do feel that their home is somewhere nearby. But one rarely meets a true Parisian in the pleasure haunts of Paris. Most of those who resort there are 'estrangers'. They seem to dominate the scene. It is difficult not to admit this. Paris is the beloved of the world. She has sent a standing invitation to world's wealth and beauty, to artists, lovers and dreamers. Come one and all. She is the refuge of all from the multimillionaire to the political rebel on whose head there is a price, from the monarch who has lost his throne to the demi monde who seeks a new career here. The doors of Paris are wide open for everybody. She also shelters the shattered old dame whose youth and charm are stories of yesterday and who bears a replica of a Franz Hals picture on her face. And still they come—tourists and connoisseurs—all who want to get just a peep into the moving drama of Paris.

It does not mean however that there are no Frenchmen in Paris. Plenty of them, a major portion of whom is engaged in administering to the needs and comforts of foreigners. One can with some effort see an exposition of their behaviourist psychology in how they treat foreigners. They are birds of passage. They come to enjoy and want to be entertained. What they get in return is *their money's worth* with which the heart is not associated. Paris exhibits the Folies for them but she herself is hardly there. For herself she carefully nurses her national institutes such as the opera, the theatre etc. England is a merchant by compulsion. Her history and heritage demand it. France is a trader by taste. Her peculiar philosophy of life and mental make up require it.

This outlook is France's special brand. A Frenchman is not shocked at anything. French painting and sculpture are thrilling but hardly in keeping other with peoples' form of decency and decorum. This attitude does not inconvenience her. Her art is not merely a dissection of the body beautiful but its delectation as well. Where a Frenchman finds the joy of creation in a thing of art, our prudish mind goes into hysterics. Yet his artistic endeavour and sense of decency

are not analysed in such a way as to make things of beauty look indecent. By accepting beauty as truth he has canalized human emotion and has transformed it into an object of greater good by a subtle artistic rendering. Real France stands imperturbable like a rock. Foreigners do not care to learn that the country of *Casino de Paris*, the land of Zola, Balzac and Paul Bourget has a restrained and conservative people in spite of sexual freedom. France accepts liberty but no libertinism.

France knows how to arrange her parlour. Even the common man of modern Europe has an innate sense of decency and beauty. A London working-girl returning with flowers in her hand at the end of the day is a common sight. These are meant for decorating her own apartments. But the French do not stop there. They decorate their exterior as well so as to attract the attention of others. France would not keep a fourteenth century fortress or even one of the Roman age at that state as a mute witness of the past. She would rebuild it exactly as it was in those days. There would be the same ramparts, the same old moats so that the ancient atmosphere thus recreated, may appeal not merely to antiquarians but also to other visitors as well. She would invite lovers of flowers to a town with an exhibition of carnations. To attract the religiously minded a memorial week would be organized in memory of a saint. I see just such a setting in an old fortress town over the hills in the south of France bedecked with flowers. They have an innate sense of decoration to attract the eyes. It is this sense which prompts Paris to exhibit the Eiffel Tower in a blaze of coloured lights. Otherwise neon light advertisements for motor cars could be flashed in other ways too. This sense also explains in a way the broad expanse of the boulevards of Paris.

True to such thoughts, whatever be the reason, the French world as represented by Champs Elysees has fulfilled itself. Without this Broadway, life's cherished dreams would have been frustrated for many. It is not merely a highway, it is a Moghul garden. Spanish towns boast of ramblas where a ramble in the evening has a special significance. It takes the form of a pleasing social performance. There is hardly any such touch in the boulevards. They however breathe with

and freedom. And what an expanse? Calcutta's broadest Broadway becomes a narrow street in comparison.

I recall that I am just a raw uninitiated youth from a quiet corner of the East interested in studies and now thrown in the streets of Europe with which I have fallen in love at first sight. These highways call and attract me. I picture them not only in my mind but actually traverse them whenever I can. In my mental make-up I am a constant traveller along their courses. This journey neither begins nor ends in this cycle of birth. I hear the footsteps of the eternal man like the breakers rolling on the beaches. Along this route of Time march the armies of Charlemagne and Napoleon, the citizen troops of Paris careering on to the Bastille. I see Rousseau, Zola, Hugo, Danton, Robespierre, Marat, Napoleon and his grand nephew, Clemenceau, Woodrow Wilson and the Welsh wizard. France's history has been written in the streets of Paris and in its salons and cafes. One hardly has that feeling in the London streets which are avenues of ceaseless activity day after day. Down the Paris highways I move along from one landmark to another. It has its starting and terminal points, journey's beginning and end. London's streets only connect these two polar points. They have hardly any other significance. If one feels choked and crowded in London, let him use the underground. A Londoner is never seen in the strangers' parade. He would not consciously take part in it.

A Frenchman's social life is spent mostly outside his own apartments. He is frank and free. He can talk politics, he can dance, he can make love in the open streets. I see hundreds of pictures of Paris here in their voices, in their gestures, in their articulations. Here I make their acquaintance and establish contacts. Here I become one with the men and women eager to know and understand each other.

But an Englishman rarely opens his tongue outside his apartments or the club. His social life or orbit of amour rotates round a small axis with a shelter above his head. To be expansive he requires at least the quiet nook of a garden or the cosy corner of his apartment or automobile. When an Englishman turns vagabond he goes for adventure to a foreign land and becomes a lion hunter or empire builder or at least a planter. It would be a sacrilege for him to turn the London streets into a free show.

There is an ample reason for this. London's road-sides do not boast of artistic exuberance or architectural beauty. True, they are not as colourless as some of the continental ones but they lack their extraordinariness as well. If one house in a London street happens to be of red colour with three steps in front and a hanging verandah, one can almost visualise the rest of the houses. Monotonous symmetry makes them insignificant. They lose their contour, their appeal and identity. They do not inspire an unruly crowd to storm the Bastille or march to rebellion with La Marseilles on their lips. So an excited London crowd would peacefully collect round the Parliament one by one and throng its entrances with slogans and posters only.

In spite of its countless parks, most of which are closed to the passerby, London fails to give mental relief in its beautifully kept open spaces. They do not provide you with relief and fill up your leisure. A foreigner, if he is not fortunate to have a long purse or a penetrative mind, is sure to feel lost. Paris has no such limitations. One can go to a restaurant, a cinema, a theatre or a concert and feel himself at home. Restaurants first became prominent in Paris during the days of the French Revolution. Their very atmosphere invites you to a *tete-a-tete*. A foreign student would not feel left alone in the Latin quarters or in a cafe in the boulevards or in Montparnasse or Montmartre. He is sure to find companions. Here there is no embargo of etiquette or stand-offishness. He may be mimicked but he would be talked to and made to feel at home. Even if he does not find such company, here at least he can sit face to face with the great past, its pageantry of life at the cross roads of history. He can peep into the future and fill up the void of the present.

I also feel that these roads hardly befit the French. They believe that France is the centre of the world. Rightly or wrongly that has become almost an obsession with them. This psychological aberration does not fit in with the breadth of their boulevards. The French are also not too keen to learn the language or the history of foreigners. So they do not know how it affects them at home or abroad. A Frenchman has yet to learn that in the Continent English is fast outstripping French. A Frenchman is ordinarily clever but he is not anxious to learn or understand anything

outside his orbit. His whole centre of gravity is Paris. His mental equipoise revolves round it. Paris is full of foreigners and tourists but the atmosphere is not affected thereby. It is absolutely insular. What matters to it is its latest fashions and follies. That is why when the whole of Europe's womanhood turns to Hollywood to imitate their tin goddesses, France remain unperturbed. Her eyes are still on Paris.

There is nothing to complain about it. In one way it is good. In the realm of aesthetic endeavour drab uniformity on a mass produced cinema scale does not encourage extraordinary qualities. Monotony lacks the expression of the individualistic mind, its special stamp. The world is bound to be richer artistically if at least in one corner of the globe a different sense of the beautiful tries to express itself away from the beaten track.

Fetishism has really taken a deep root in the French mind. Its psychological value is immense. It is deeply ingrained in their subconscious mind. And because it is so, it lacks diversity. On this feature a monarchy may thrive and an army march, but a democracy feels much handicapped. The third Republic required the continuous services of a really gifted leader. No doubt the ship of the state sails on, but it is the Civil Service that supplies the motive force. Premiers may go and premiers may come, ministers may be made and unmade. To-day they receive confidence, tomorrow they lose it. Such is the game of French politics. In this shuttlecock business it is the civil servants who keep the administration going. France lacks a leader in politics or in statecraft. But there can neither be a Hitler nor a Roosevelt in France. Here political leaders neither reign nor rule. Frenchmen have neither the British genius of pinning their faith on broadening precedents nor can they suffer a dictator. This is a land where individuals flourish but no great individual is created as the result of dialectic struggle.

Some historians date the modern times from the fall of the Bastille. Possibly a future chronicler would begin it from the Russian Revolution. Those of us who have had the good fortune to have been born before the crucial date of the proletariat rise might be dubbed mediaeval, though through death we may belong to the modern age. Truly there is no sanctity in a particular date. Life is a continuous stream, a boiling kettle from which leap new ideas

and new ideals. There is no room for compartmental growth. What is modern to-day is bound to be called mediaeval to-morrow. Time and tide do not wait to be partitioned. Without going into philosophical polemics as to where the dividing line is, it would be idle not to emphasise the unique contribution of the French Revolution to the contemporary world thought and politics. The pivotal point of that change-over was Paris. Even to-day, while walking in a dark night through the streets made immortal in the pages of history and literature imagination may conjure up the vision of the call of the human spirit in the Tuileries and the Bastille and see the lava flood sweeping away the thrones of the mighty Bourbons. . You can see the profile of Marie Antoinette whose lovely silken tresses were the pride of France but turned grey overnight. This is the place where the drama of human awakening began. This is the place where blood and sweat, thunder and cloud, love and hate mingled. Paris never sleeps. Thrice in a hundred years enemies have knocked at her gates. She let the legions thunder past and survived every onslaught.

The heart of Paris is artistic. After the collapse of France in 1870 Bismark took her wealth and her land. That war was continued in the First World War. The Second World War was again a continuation of the First. But when Napoleon vanquished Italy, he brought invaluable art treasures for which, even if Italy had the strength, she would not have fought. Napoleon put them on the world's pedestal. It was not he who built the Louvre but he certainly turned it into an artists' paradise. Though Napoleon was a Corsican, he had the Frenchman's heart. If you be a brigand collect only such treasures as have intrinsic value to the world and do not prove an embarrassment. That is the lesson of Napoleon's loots.

It is futile to try to give an idea of the Louvre. But there is no dearth of lesser known schools or museums. A foreigner who has not seen Luxembourg has missed much. There are so many places to see all round. In a flood-lit night people become aware for the first time of the grandeur of Trocadero. How many of our countrymen are aware of the Sorbonne? Yet some of Europe's best brains flock here to have a finishing touch to their training. It was born in an age when the light of learning was dim and its radiation limited and when old bigotry did not hesitate to stifle the onward march of new

knowledge. Paris kept the lamp burning and sheltered in its fold people from different countries of Europe who came there for education. The University of Paris is one of the oldest in Europe.

Versailles is at some distance from Paris, but has hardly a separate entity. It lives only as a complement to Paris, both in splendour and in luxury. The magnificent palace and the beauty of the green forests that encompass its grandeur reveal the France of Louis XIV. He was the State. Such a combination of paradoxes, of beauty and vice, of splendour and corruption, of gallantry and intrigue has hardly been witnessed elsewhere. Versailles still vibrates with the sweet cadence of the dancing steps of the famous beauties in its marble halls. It still reminds one of the ceaseless rounds of deadening pleasures, its groves of secret tryst, its faint caressing breath. Hungry stones still stand as mute witnesses of love and lust, of pomp and pageantry, of ambition unsatiated and frustration unredeemed. To find a historic parallel one has to go to Shah Jehan's Delhi. The only relevant news items of the Court was the barometer of His Majesty's favour and displeasure. Ability in administration and valour in war were secondary. Pomp and precedence in the Court formed the summum bonum of life. Naturally fighting qualities did not thrive in such an atmosphere. Yet war-mindedness was on the increase. Noble families had nothing of nobility left in them. Luxury and love of the fineries of life were eating into their vitals. Versailles typified this malaise. Its glory was but the sunset glow of the west. *L'état c'est moi* was the favourite political slogan of Louis XIV. He was the Bourbon Shah Jehan of France.

Try as you may, you cannot wipe out Paris from your mind. Victor Hugo describes her in minute details in his books. One has not to hunt for her. Who forgets Notre Dame and its sonorous chimes? Once heard, they reverberate in one's ears. Who dares forget the serpentine Seine and its bridges? Who cares to forget the gardens, the *voulevards*? Even a stranger who has known Paris for a night is sure to remember her gratefully. Paris is an elixir, a pick-me-up for mental exhaustion. In the subconscious mind she magnifies herself hundredfold. Paris has a knack of creating confidence, of permeating a sense of abandon, of what they call '*flaner*'.

It is in her sense of abandon, of what they call 'flaner'. It is in her air. Even the casual guest of a night cannot but catch the infection and get the inspiration.

That famous picture of Mona Lisa was once stolen from the Louvre. All France took it to heart. It was a national calamity. There was a country-wide uproar. It was later recovered, but vandalism had taken its toll. It was found that the lips of that famous painting were disfigured by traces of violent kisses. The thief's psychic lapse was perhaps a tribute to the artist's brush. When I heard this story from a lover of art in the Louvre the theft seemed to me more a homage than a sacrilege. Reprehensible as it was, it had at least a redeeming feature. The artist's instinct was not dead in this thief who, I am sure, was a Frenchman. The artistic abandon of his mental make-up leads me to that conclusion. A Frenchman may not always be an intimate friend but certainly radiates a warmth of feeling. My painter friend who told me this story and who was painting a facsimile of La Gioconda accepted this tribute from a poet of another land.

Somewhere in eternity Beauty is smile
And seats you on the throne;
We come to pay homage and beguile,
and arts do world adorn.
Models will wither and artists die,
But music colour and rhyme
For which our fondest emotions sigh
Will for ever stand sublime.

In the fading misty moonlight Paris becomes the fairy queen of the night. In that faint light I almost feel her mystic charm. The soft smile of Mona Lisa slowly dissolves and permeates every fibre of the city. Who knows what thoughts are concealed underneath, what pains and joys? It is not merely 'Parce', but the world's dearie. But she does not yearn for anybody. Others yearn for her. At her altar all bow and offer their heart. To her come people from all lands. But does she keep an account of all that? Paris is ever evolving and creating and recreating herself. She sits enthroned in the heart of the universe. I see her smile.

May the lustre of her eyes never be dim with the pangs of love.

THE MUSIC OF LIFE IN ITALY

In the Renaissance man discovered the world and himself. In the second discovery was reflected an unrivalled revival of arts and letters. Never again has mankind seen such an awakening. Never has humanity been glorified so much, the song of man sung so well. Gods came down from the Olympus to live among men—so went the popular saying. In the wake of the Renaissance came the religious Reformation in Germany and the artistic revival in Italy.

The vision of Italy changed. It discovered new colours, new meanings in life where none was supposed to exist. The life of austerity and self-renunciation gave way to one of prosperity and joyous abandon. True, that the flood-waters brought with them much that was muddy and unclean. It is said that in the archway of a church in Basle were carved souls hastily putting on clothes to cover their nudity before producing themselves for the Judgment Day. A hundred years later a nude female figure was put on the tomb of one of the Popes. This is the way of the world. Reaction relentlessly follows action.

It is not saying too much that in the middle ages man was steeped in the thoughts of the other world. The clergy became intolerant and education cloistered and stagnant. Both helped to keep in bondage man's normal feelings and curiosities and their free expression. But nothing could eliminate the thirst for beauty and aesthetic sense. Poets and artists refused to shut up the mysteries of the earth, wanted to feel and express the natural human impulses, to tear up the veil of artful allegories and the cloak of prudish chivalry. Efforts were made to bring the light of naturalness into the dark chambers of the middle ages. In Sanskrit there is a saying that knowledge is what leads to liberty. That knowledge broke down the chains of ten centuries in that dawn of new awakening.

The new knowledge recognised the right of man to live in this world with his desires and cravings for the finer things of the earth. He began to make light of the allurement of a promised heaven in future and the alternative of a fearful purgatory. His youthful days were rescued from the decadent knowledge of the time and the stereotyped study of scriptures. His intellect was lit up with emotion, and interest in life with

beauty, youth and freedom. Like our Indian knowledge in the middle ages European knowledge also was not meant for any and everybody. Culture was confined to the cloisters. Brahminism in Europe, unlike India, could of course not be obtained by birth but could be acquired by belonging to a holy order. New knowledge and curiosity for things new suffused society with a rich romance. Architecture no longer clung to the church, nor painting to the patrician. The vanguards of the Renaissance were drawn to this earth and in course of adventures put an end to the then known geographical limits and discovered a new world.

In this period one new devotee of the old learning declared that he was going to bring life to the dead. But renaescent Italy did not stop at bringing the dead back to life. It recognised the living, realised the earthly earth as beautiful, cheerful and worth living in.

“Blessed was it in that dawn to be alive,
But to be young was very Heaven.”

Worldly pleasures and pagan enjoyment are fleeting; this tangible life is a symbol of the life beyond; this birth is but the time for preparing for the unknown hereafter: such wise and restricting counsels could no longer fetter the dancing feet and singing throats of the time.

Beauty became truth in Italy. The long condemned and uncared-for human body came to be clothed with beauty and considered a replica of the godly frame. Human feelings became sacred and surcharged with divine grace. Religious susceptibilities no longer ran the risk of being wounded by the portrayal of gods behaving like mortals. It was of course not possible to pursue fine arts without the patronage of the Church, but it gave them the necessary impetus. The sweetheart was portrayed through the painting of the goddess and the latter took on the aspect of the beloved. Tagore has analysed this transformation in his poem on the love poems of Radha and Kriṣhna, the divine lovers of the Hindu pantheon.

Where can I get more?
I make my God my darling;
In the latter God I adore.

This interpretation, to my mind, sums up very well the central idea of the European Renaissance as well. The painter

saw and portrayed gods with human tenderness and affection and men with godly devotion and sincerity. In the result Italian art gives us the paintings of real live human beings, be they in the garb of men or gods.

In the Uffizi Palace in Florence this idea came to my mind time and again. Only one woman figures in all the pictures by Andrea del Sarto. She is the same person who appears in different poses, subjects and settings. It is not at all difficult to guess who the lucky lady was. But poor Andrea. His life was so sad and full of frustration. In his youth he had the genius to compete with Raphael and others but it could not develop. It got mixed up with the beauty of his wife. He would not take to any other model except her. Nor did he hesitate to fetter his ability and fritter his genius on that account. The pangs of defeat became more pathetic as he realised that she had failed to supply any inspiration to his art. This tender pathos of his life has been very well expressed in one of Browning's poems. Lucrecia was preparing to go for a secret tryst with her lover and even then Andrea was steeped in her thoughts. He was thinking that perhaps in the life beyond he would get yet another chance to compete with Raphael, Leonardo and Angelo, but defeat would be his inevitable lot as Lucrecia would still be by his side.

What more touching music of life there could be than a story like this? A story which sprang from the very liberty of thought and life which the forces of the Renaissance released in Italy.

Here I was tempted to remember the story behind that famous painting of Grouze—'The Broken Pitcher'. He also was frustrated in his effort to find the sweetheart and the inspirer of his art in the same woman.

Thanks to the excellent reproductions of the paintings found in Florence I have had a life-long acquaintance with this town. Still it appears to be a dream-land of painting. Roaming in the galleries here is a real romance. I went back to my childhood at the sight of Raphael's Madonna in the Pitti Palace. I felt like calling the boy in marble who is seen picking out a thorn from his foot. Even the shops of old curios and ornaments on the Vecchio bridge on the Arno seemed to belong to the world of painting. The allegorical picture of Dante's Dream came to my mind. The poppies in that paint-

ing represented the supreme sleep, the lamp about to go out the departing life and the light white cloud borne by angels the soul of Beatrice.

Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, the immortal composer of Vande Mataram, India's song of liberty and national anthem, wrote that there is a curse in youthful love. Such love turns into only a tender memory as separation is inevitable in later life. But what a heavenly music can be created on earth by such memories is illustrated in Dante's life. In 1274 A.D. he, a mere boy of nine, saw revealed in a girl of nine the immortal inspiration of his life.

Beatrice passed away at the age of twenty-five and Dante never got her as his wife. But the greatest poet of Italy did not at once burst into poems on his departed beloved. He saw a divine dream and decided that he could not write anything about her until he became big enough for adequately describing her. He prayed to God to let him live for some more years and to bless him so that he could write of her in such a way as no other woman in the world would be sung of. Thereafter he would not mind being taken away by God so that he could set his eyes on the blessed Beatrice just as she was seeing the great Creator. The music of new life that we find in *Vita Nuova*, the glimpses of eternal life and the intensity of immortal love have a permanent place in world literature.

Restraint and devotion have given no less beauty and refinement to this love song of Dante than love has given it inspiration. In our Indian life of fleeting flashes and emotional outbursts the lesson of Dante's patience and tireless devotion should have a special significance.

Who named this town Florence? It seems that none but a musical name like this would fit it so well. The exterior of the Duomo looks like an architecture in dream. Equally matching in beauty is the colourful Campanile. Michael Angelo had described the three doors on the three sides of the Baptistery as fit for the portals of heaven. The view of the town from the top of the Duomo can be appreciated but not expressed.

What is the ideal of beauty? Most of us have at the back of our mind an idealistic vision of our sweetheart, the dream companion of our youth. But she defies description and any effort to depict her in lan-

guage brings out but a poor image. Still there she is, beyond all questions though beyond our reach as well. Nevertheless we preserve an ideal, may be of bodily beauty, or mental expressiveness or superior culture. The poet describes it with his pen, the painter with his brush. From time immemorial man has been indebted to them for the expression of his dream, his imagination. That is why in the history of arts we find a procession of endless forms of beauty.

In the stone age woman was above all the mother of the progeny, the progeny that had to be protected from the cold, cruel and destructive elements of Nature in Europe. So the woman of the stone age was robust, an elephantine mass of womanhood, with huge heavy gait. On the stone walls of the cave the caveman used to draw the figure of a bison with the object of hunting a bison. This shows the way his mind worked. Similarly in every age man has portrayed his partner the way he has wanted her. She too has presented herself to man that way. The Greek ideal was a balanced figure of poise and personality. Shapely was the human form, not broken up in unreal lines and unbalanced contours for the sake of expressing some personal idea of the sculptor. The Greek artist figured divinity in the mould of humanity. The teaching that God created man after His own image seems to have appealed to him. His Venus was the perfect exposition of the heavenly beauty of a woman. To him the exquisite beauty of the almost legendary Athenian, Phryne, was as much real and a subject of human skill as that of any pagan goddess. Religious sensitiveness did not get any shock at this idea. The populace supported and applauded this link between humanity and divinity. Roman civilisation lost no time in picking up this Greek conception of beauty.

In the golden age of art in Italy the beauties of hill towns became the natural models of Madonna. Their figures were used by artists for depicting sacred stories. Religious ardour worshipped divinity in these human forms. In all his religious paintings Corregio had human models before him. So had the Dutch and Flemish painters, though their standard of beauty would not appeal to people of other countries. That is why the buxom smiling housewives of Rubens and Rembrandt could not cause much flutter in the art gallery of the body beautiful.

In yet another period of painting artists forgot the goddess altogether while painting the woman. The eighteenth century French artists devoted themselves to the interior decoration of the apartments of royal favourites like Du Barry and Pompadour. The English artists got busy in painting the British artiscocrats, the patrons of the day. These paintings are now the much prized possession of American millionaires. These are the best proof and advertisement of their blue blooded ancestry.

These feminine figures were after all essentially human both in form and feeling. But in the world of painting yet another type of women have put in their appearance in a quite different form. Nobody would doubt them to be human in form at any rate. I refer to the lanky willows with crane-like necks of the school of Rossetti or the bizarre figures of the Cubists of the day. If woman has to adapt herself to this shape the sculptor will have to apply his chisel to her flesh and bone instead of bronze and stone

Such are the variety and vicissitude of taste in art. Even then above all the changing tides of style in different ages stand the Grecian and Roman models of beauty. Nothing takes away from their appeal nor age from their appreciation. Venus de Milo and Venus de Medici will always receive the world's tribute as the finest feminine figures. They will reveal a new light even to the eyes accustomed to and content with the inviting females smiling out of chocolate boxes.

To an Indian the picture galleries of Florence are incomplete without the picture of the Birth of Venus. It brings back to my mind the description in the Vedas, the most ancient Aryan scripture of India, of the rise of Urvashi, the celestial dancing damsel, from the ocean at the dawn of the creation. Still more am I reminded of Tagore's classic poem on her. She has eternal youth and beauty and as she rises from the ocean its myraids of enchanted waves bow down at her feet like the hydra with its countless heads. Venus or Urbashi, by whatever name you may call her, is the embodiment of the artist's supreme dream. Neither a mother nor a wife, nor a daughter she alone is *sui generis*. She stands with her light dancing toes at the centre of the full blown desire of the universe.

Inexplicable are the vicissitudes of fortune. The historic grand palaces of Florence did not always add to man's delight.

The beautiful arcade of the Bargello Palazzo was not always a place of quiet beauty. Once many had to meet the gallows in this very place and the quaint arms now kept in the museum were in use for a very different type of exhibition. Sometime this palace was a prison and then the head office of the city guards. It pains one to associate such a fine building with such fearful activities. You cannot escape this thought as you come here to see Michael Angelo's *Bacchus*.

At the gateway of the Lanzi Palace stands Perseus, the immortal creation of Cellini. In front of the Vecchi palace stands guard the figure of Neptune. But this palace was used in different ages as town hall, prison house and palace. And now it is a Government office. Here was gaoled Savonarola, the heroic monk of Florence, the champion of her piety and duty. In the courtyard outside he was burnt alive. What a strange fate for a famous town! With its history are associated three supermen in three different branches of civilisation, viz., Michael Angelo, Galileo and Machiavelli. The monuments of all three stand in the same place.

In spite of their separatism and individualistic existence Milan, Genoa, Florence, Venice and other petty states of Italy have contributed so much to civilisation the like of which it will be difficult for even the unified Italy to give. In each city-state popular will was strong and effective. Each citizen had his eye on the city elders. The applause of the public was reflected in the support of the friends as each member of the limited public was known to the other and the elders too. The dukes and counts were not distant from them and their governments not machineries foreign or far away. The concentrated efforts of these tiny principalities have given to the world what only several bigger could do. That is why each historic town of Italy has to be seen and felt as a separate entity, the art and treasures of each judged as contributions of separate units.

The music of life in Italy is not like the single strain of melody as one finds it in an Indian song. That music is composed, like the European orchestra, of a harmony of tunes set by different cities. Their diversity itself supplies the unity that lies behind this matchless music.

Milano,—the very name conjures up a vision of the Muse of music. The whole shadowy expanse of the Victor Emmanuel Gallery seems to be filled with its quivering tune. Its colossal

dome and spacious courtyard vie with biggest cathedral of Europe. Glass, glass and nothing but glass on all sides—that is the arresting feature of this place. In a poetic age it could be fittingly named as the arch of sparkling crystal.

Such galleries are peculiar to Italian cities. In every town there is a social centre, either a gallery or a public park on a hill-top in the suburb. Round the galleries are fashionable and well-appointed shops, 'ristorantis' and many other establishments. On one side of the Victor Emmanuel Gallery is the Cathedral—the world's eighth wonder (*la huitieme merveille du monde*) with seven thousand portraits. On the other is the memorial to Leonardo da Vinci and the famous Scala Theatre. On the four sides of the Gallery are its four wide arms, where four streams of humanity can meet. In the centre is Cafe Biffi. If one wants to find out the vital centre of Milan, he has to come here, to this temple of humanity and not to its cathedrals or gorgeous tombs of the dead royalty. Well-groomed men and women meet and greet here with great show of decorum and talk of things mundane and nearer to heart. Their words resound in the crystal dome above. This is the place where the world's singers meet. This is the climax of their ambition.

From all corners of the world these seekers of fame come here like flies attracted by Milan's flame. All of them, however, cannot succeed. I some times wonder what their reaction is when they are disillusioned. These unfortunate people—and their number is legion—troop here with all the high hopes of a successful career, calmly take macaroni in trattorias, hoping inwardly and fervently that one day untold wealth might roll at their feet and the laurels of the Muses on their heads. If in their first attempt they are lucky to get an assignment in any town near Milan, if their names appear in the papers, how flattered and hopeful they become. Alas, for most of them the bubble of hope bursts sooner or later. Shattered hopes and aspirations close the path for many. A few of course struggle. The elder and more seasoned ones try to dissuade the juniors by recounting their own tales of struggle and bitter experiences. Some of these are opera singers. A picked group of them talk of the palaces on the bank of Lake Como, of the private pleasure-groves there. They are the undisputed masters

of the music world. But there are others and unlucky ones who cannot but curse their bad lot. Yet they hope and hope for a change in their fortune.

Scala is the Mecca of all singers. One considers himself thrice lucky if he can make his appearance before its footlights. Half the battle is then won. But how many a hope has been blasted and ambition frustrated. I happened to notice a group of young girls straining their utmost as apprentices in the art academy of Scala. Many of these might have lived and moved happily and easily in other professions. But many would go under while only a few succeed. I remember that fair-haired English girl, that snow-white Russian pearl, that flaming Spanish maiden, that sophisticated French ripple of smiles, fair representatives of so many lands with so many ideas and different approaches to life. In spite of their different outlooks and temperaments they have collected here with one single purpose—how to become famous in the music world. However smart and confident they may appear when trooping along the street they have to face the same stark reality. When they actually enter the profession their first reaction is likely to be a little shocking—to adopt a poetic simile of our own land—like that of a timorous deer fleeing from a forest fire. How many of them would survive the possibility of the first disappointment and flourish in front of the foot lights of theatres and operas? In the background of this thought the famous exhibits of the Scala Museum reminiscent of the immortal artist Verdi pale into insignificance. Here I think only of these bashful maidens and hope that one day at least one of them becomes another Juditta Pasta with the world at her feet. And the rest——?

Niobe of nations. Rome is indescribable, that ancient town on seven hills on the Tiber, that giant among cities and that city of giants, of supermen. There is something special about it, something out of the ordinary. Not only the Romans but whoever had any contact with it imbibed some of its greatness and acted as superman. Whichever way you look at it, you see Rome's deep imprint on the sands of time, in the history of humanity. If Rome were nothing else but the Vatican and St. Peter's it would still be acclaimed as the city eternal. All roads lead to Rome.

In the every day life of flesh and blood man can hardly do

without a living symbol in the shape of a form which he can touch, feel and appreciate with his senses. Much as we think of the Ultimate Reality as shapeless or formless, in our limited subconscious mind there is bound to be its automatic material representation in some form or symbol. It occupies a quiet corner in our mind imperceptibly like the movement of a wave, like the sweet fragrance of a flower, like the fresh dew on green grass. Their charm often lies too deep to be expressed in words. Would the wide blue sky have that much significance if the blueness be not there, though we know that scientists do not recognise it and in fact it is non-existent. Life will become a drag and mind a bondage if the freedom of the beautiful blue sky be not there to lend colour to our mental horizon. Man has in himself this divine gift of imagination, this power to visualise things in his own way. That is why when the sun sets in the west and the day and the night and the earth and the sky meet in colourful raptures of unison the horizon becomes the meeting place of the finite with infinite by some process of our own imagery. The formless takes shape in form. We take a dip into this world of beauty to find that which is beyond and behind it.

I was strongly reminded of this on the Christmas day in Rome. There I was privileged to see an orthodox Christian service and naturally became anxious to define idolatry. Do we mean thereby the worship of Him through forms and images?

I wonder. It is only when a simple ignorant man considers an idol itself to be God that idolatry creeps in. But when he says that God exists and permeates everywhere, the idol not excluding, he does not lose sight of the Omnipresent and it is the spirit behind the form that he begins to worship. In India people have imagined God in countless forms, no less than countless formalities. It would, in my opinion, be wrong to dub such worshippers as idolators. Any form of religion that flows from the Upanishads, the intensely intellectual expositions of the Spirit Supreme can be debased, as some sometimes were, but never devoid of the essence of religion.

The innocent villager of India taking his devout dip in the Ganges only expresses his gratitude to the life-giving stream of God's kindness. His Ganges water forms no more the flow of religion than the Christian's water of the Jordan.

But do we in India mistake Christianity for idolatry? In my efforts to understand other peoples' faiths I have often entered their places of worship and tried to feel at one with them. I may not have met the best of them, but the ordinary worshipper has always confessed that God in his mind is a Divine Something in some form even when none is enjoined to exist. If, after all, religion is morality tinged with divine emotion what is wrong in the expression of that emotion?

I noticed with little surprise that here too devout Catholics worship Him through forms and symbols. This is nowhere more pronounced than in St. Peter's. From the Christ on Madonna's lap to the Christ on the Cross each phase of this great life has been carved on stone and painted on canvas and worshipped by millions of devotees. Saints and apostles too have been remembered with religious fervour. People have knelt before them, prayed, offered candles, and confessed their sin. They have burnt incense at the altar of God. In this greatest of the festive days it was a great privilege to utter with His Holiness the Pope 'Santa Maria Madre'. Those deep and sonorous words still vibrate in my ears. Standing before the bronze statue of St. Peter whose one foot has been worn out with the kisses of worshippers through ages, I recalled the foot prints of St. Peter at the Quo Vadis temple where, when fleeing from Rome, he got the vision of Christ. In this respect Catholicism is very similar to Hinduism in its poetic exuberance, flight of imagination and artistic expression. We are not the only people to worship God through His worldly outward expressions. We are in good company here.

Rome is paradise lost as well as regained. Ancient Rome was the work of Titans. Those who could conceive and execute those days these gigantic columns, the Forum, the Via del Impera and the Coliseum which could accommodate at least fifty thousand people were nothing short of supermen. The remains of these monuments, their stilled tongues still send their silent greetings to the sightseer. The Coliseum, the temple of the Vestal Virgins dedicated to the gods, bacchanal orgies, triumphal marches, gladiator fights, Caesars' tombs all have entered into that spectacular drama that Rome is. It heightens when we remember that Rome also registers that poignant struggle of the human soul and its liberation by the Son of God, of the clash of ideas and swords, of heathens and

Christians. Here one cannot but think of the immolation of beasts and men thrown into the amphitheatre, though the extent of the massacres now described may or may not have been accurately judged. Rome's callousness was as colossal as its prowess. At one time Christians were not safe in Rome. Insecurity followed them even beyond death and they had to be buried very stealthily in the walls of the so-called temples, known to us as catacombs.

Perhaps the Latins excel in giving expression to sadistic tortures and derive a peculiar pleasure in portraying them. One often wonders whether it is the mortification of the flesh rather than the internal anguish of those who have laid down their lives for the sake of religion, that had engaged the attention of the artist in works like the horrifying statue of the flaying alive of St. Bartholomew in the Milan Cathedral. In the Sistine Chapel in the Vatican there is a furlong-long tapestry of ghastly beauty depicting the Massacre of the Innocents which can wipe out all the joys of seeing Michael Angelo's famous fresco of the Last Judgment, the incomparable beauty of Apollo Belvedere, the figure of Laocoon, one of the best specimens of sculpture. In St. Peter's too there are several mosaic statues the art of which is unmatched in execution but which can haunt the dreams of many an adolescent. Examples are not however rare where pain and torture have been sublimated to an exquisite pitch by these artists. All of a sudden, without any warning one comes across a superb representation of this in the picture of St. Sebastian pierced by arrows. His serene face is aglow with divine light and tenderness which not only inspire but also lift us far above the din and dust of daily life, its petty cares and worries. Such pictures light up our moments of frustration and teach us to realise our destiny. The picture of the dying Gaul in the Palatine Museum not only terrifies us, but draws our sympathy. It unveils the untold tale of an unavailing heroism the last chapter of which is death. Yet each contour of the body reflects the strength of mind. Each facial contraction and each line of the forehead though presaging pain beam with life and vigour. There is no touch of horror but of heroism only in such death. Rather it depicts the greatness of a befitting end following a life borne with bravery.

It would be really difficult to find a parallel of such a

mixture of cruelty with culture anywhere in the world. Luxury hardly ever realises the pangs of misery. Pagan pleasures can rarely sympathise with sorrow. The self-centred pampered patrician used to live on the labours of his born slaves or bondsmen bought with a few ducats. He was not schooled in adversity. Not that he did not know the ups and downs of life. The external enemy does not lay siege frequently but the internal enemy never gives one's spirit any rest. That is what happened to the Roman. Within the small perimeter of Rome there were many more hangers-on than even in Athens. Lust and luxury accompanied pomp and power and corroded national life. In this land of Croesus and Bacchus life flowed swift but death swifter. It lurked just round the corners and struck unawares. The pleasure grove of Luccallus on the top of the Pincho Hill and the famous baths of Caracalla portray only too truly the peculiar traits of Roman life. The very atmosphere was cruel and cynic. How many sighs, how many tears and how many broken hearts have not been registered there in the soft spring winds, smothered by remorseless fate! Boiling in a cauldron of passions in a stage of ferment, love and life were of no consequence. No one was immune from the tentacles of tragedy. It might be an unfortunate emperor or his beloved floating down the pleasures of life and suddenly being caught in the whirlpool of death. Ancient Rome was full of these elemental upheavals, of the furies of fate and their inevitable consequence. We still feel them in the atmosphere.

Like the traditional Phoenix, Rome has risen again and again from her own ashes. It became the seat of an ecclesiastical empire as it was once of the secular. Even the German Emperor could not resist the temptation of calling himself the head of the Holy Roman Empire. Rome established yet another empire in the days of the Renaissance and the Reformation—a cultural empire over the realm of art. In this century Mussolini was only trying to follow the old tradition. In Rome one hardly feels the distinction between the old and the new. They are blended together so nicely. Only the diameter is enlarged. Mussolini, however hard we may be on him for all his Fascism and part in the last Great War, was a real lover of Rome. He contributed something positive to Rome's life. The huge highways, the boulevards, the new

transport system, the public parks all testified to a new drive, a new dream and a new discipline. Italian art also got a fillip. I could measure this from what I saw of the Futurist Art in an exhibition in Rome. The Duce did not neglect the old monuments either. Adequate arrangements were made to hold them up to the admiring gaze of foreign visitors. These monuments, now well-cared for, have thus gained additional longevity. Italy also started dreaming in the 'thirties of the revival of the Roman empire, of colonial expansion. The *Via del Impera* is but an expression of that urge. How and why she failed therein are recorded in the broken fragments of tanks and planes in the sandswept deserts of North Africa.

The new Rome's Capitol standing proudly against the background of the old is an artistic blending of the ancient and the modern. One can hardly conceive of such a perfect symmetry where the old forms background of the new and reveals it in a suitable setting. But the art of the new Rome has not spoilt the aristocracy of the old.

Naples also boasts of one such perfect background. Across the placid bay Napoli stands serene like a painter's dream. Behind her lies the fuming face of the Vesuvius. The grey pall of smoke from her ever active crater puts a bizarre screen across the multi-coloured sky. It cannot, however, efface the eternal blue completely. It makes one corner of the sky aglow with fire just like the red embers of a setting sun, the funeral pyre of a dying day.

A nation that could live and thrive, drink and dance in such abundance right in front of the angry Vesuvius and listen to her rumblings must certainly be admired for its character. These men had the uncommon ability to enjoy life as well as to renounce it when necessary. Pompeii flourished within the belt of the Vesuvius' wrath. From the canopy of ashes the town has been recovered and laid bare before our eyes. The temple of Isis, the amphitheatre, the dramatic hall—all can be seen as they were before destruction. The skeletons of a dog who shrank in pain and of the beautiful maiden whose playful charms perhaps lent a touch of dream to many eyes, still lie there as they were when the Vesuvius overtook them. Paintings in the city halls unearthed from the debris of lava-flood still survive.

It was my great luck that Vesuvius that day gave up his slumber in honour of my visit. It was rumbling and trembling. My Italian guide would not lead me to the crater and gripped my hand firmly to prevent my running towards it. But, as luck would have it, a little of the volcanic spirit also gripped me. I was eager to go as near the crater as possible. Such a chance of adventure rarely comes our way and I threw all caution to the four winds. I remembered Tagore's words—"For once, O cautious traveller, for once relax and lose your way".

The guide tried to stop me forcibly, but in vain. I dashed ahead and so long as I was not overpowered with the sulphur fumes and could keep my feet steady over the heated surface I proceeded on and on. I could not and did not do anything more, at least nothing to make me notorious or worth writing home about. The only memento that I could carry from that angry mountain was as much of liquid lava as I could get moulded in two kerchiefs. Looking at this solidified mass these days I still fall into a reverie over the day when once in my carefully measured and circumscribed life I boldly went ahead in sheer despite of it.

I come back to Rome the evergreen. A good portion of Italy's taxes is spent to keep her young and fresh. Naturally the burden of taxation on the whole nation has to be heavy if its art galleries and palaces have to be kept trim and tastefully decorated amidst fine gardens. The beautiful modern monuments also are not neglected. Fine specimens of them may be seen everywhere in Rome. In the Borghese Museum, the famous sculpture of Canova—the half reclining Paolina creates a dreamy atmosphere around her. When Paolina sat as the artists's model her great brother, Napoleon, was shocked to see her almost nude. The sister peremptorily asked him to mind his business and added with an acid jest that there was still enough warmth left in the room. Yes, one can still feel that warmth, not of the material world but of the world of art. I mean the warmth of genius. We are used to hear of Italian art and artists from our boyhood. A major portion of the realm of art is dominated by them. Whenever we talk or think of Europe and her art, Italian pictures are bound to be in our mind. In Rome I made a new acquaintance. Sculptor Bernini was my special discovery. His figure of 'David' over-

whelmed me with a vibrant sense of grace and masterful execution.

I sat among the ruins of the Capitoline Hill and mused. I knew not what I thought or what was in my mind. Perhaps I dreamt of that peculiarity of the Italian race—*dolce far niente*—a special trait which words cannot express but heart enjoys. It had on me an effect that was at once radiant and yet somnolent. I did feel that whether in the past or in the present, Italian national life centred round two essential things—a sense of chivalry and a sense of abandon. Even as recently as the Fascist days these two traits were there in bold relief in spite of all the codes and canons. There were as many military parades and international exhibitions as national prestige demanded and yet a few paces away behind the facade of the Capitol and overlooking it laughter and languor would mingle with sunshine and roll in the ripples of the lakes overlooking the vine groves. This divergence is the characteristic of the nation and fits in well with her. Side by side stand Virgil and Cicero, Nero and Marcus Aurelius. Courage and bravery stand out along with luxury and debauchery, strength and endeavour with decay and oblivion. All these combine to create the ruins of Rome. It is futile to try to catch her real spirit without the training of a historian, the eyes of an artist and the inspiration of a philosopher. Otherwise she baffles all efforts to understand her. In the Borghese Museum there is a statue of Apollo running after Proserpina and trying to catch hold of her. Just as he touched one part of her body, that part turned into a tree. Apollo was baffled not once or twice but always till the whole of her body turned into a tree and eluded him. Similarly does Rome slip away from the visitor's grasp. She is eternal but elusive as well.

ONE NIGHT IN VENICE

To see Venice and then die. No adage could be more appropriately popular with the tourist. Thanks to the movies everybody has previous acquaintance with this picturesque city. But Venice in reality by far surpasses in beauty the Venice of pictures. This is the only place I can think of where, to remember two famous poems of Wordsworth, "Yarrow Visited" pleases and excites more than 'Yarrow Unvisited'.

The Grand Canal has lent grace to the whole city, just as the armlet does to the lovely feminine arm. Bounded by the bangle, the bondage of the arm is its own beauty. This canal is the main highway of Venice. On its two banks are the palaces of the Oligarchs, unspoilt in their beauty even after the saline touch of centuries. The gondolier plies his gondola standing in the poppa in the stern. The passenger may take shelter in the felze i.e. low-roofed room on the boat. Now-a-days we rarely come across the multi-coloured open gondolas with golden border, placed on light wooden frames. Those exquisite pictures of Bellini are things of the past. Even then a tourist's visit to Venice is in vain if he does not move in a gondola.

From the political point of view it is hard to get the equal of Venice in the history of the world. This small city was the bulwark of Europe against sustained attacks from the east. It was the perfect example of an uncommon type of statecraft, viz., oligarchy. No other power of similar dimensions had the same skill in naval warfare. In wealth and luxury Venice of the middle ages was the envy and idol of all Europe. This city gave proof of its catholicity of taste by accepting all different styles of art. Here flourished in different ages but with the same felicity different schools of architecture, Byzantine, Gothic. pre-Renaissance and post-Renaissance. Even the casual traveller will notice the Byzantine style adopted in the multi-coloured mosaic of St. Mark's while side by side appears the Gothic style in the Doge's palace. Because of her isolation and situation in one corner of Europe she came in contact with different currents of civilisation. She adopted them spontaneously and liberally. Her constant fights with and watch on the Turkish hordes did not narrow down her vision. Liberty

was preserved not only in political development but in artistic evolution also. Orthodoxy did not circumscribe her art, nor provincialism her heart.

In the evening glow heightened by the incomparable blue of the Italian sky and the greyish purple of the lagoon the marble filigree work of the Doge's palazzo looks like superfine lace work. In the meandering lanes near by very subtle and delicate crystal glass wares are produced and one has no doubt that these are the handiwork of the descendants of that very race which turned out the marble work. Similar is the conclusion with regard to the decorated leather jackets of books—all glories of old, of an age when manual deftness produced works of art.

But why handicraft alone? Even as regards the environment Venice hesitates to set her foot outside the eighteenth century. When the fading sun-rays slant down upon the dome of St. Mark and its mosaic artistry, the greedy flock of pigeons, assembling in the courtyard, creates the same impression. Their predecessors had their feed from the hands of Dante and Petrarch. These used to make the atmosphere oppressively poignant with their incessant cooing when Casanova wrote his countless love-letters basking in the sun here, in this very courtyard.

No doubt Casanova's exploits are all exaggerated. In his age exaggeration was a luxury and luxury a glory. The pictures of Guardi, the painter of the life of Venice, produce the same impression. The life of luxury and artificiality that Venice led in the eighteenth century is fully reflected in his pictures. The eyes of the Oligarchs of this elderly state betray their mad pursuit of pleasure. Warriors by the side of ladies disguised in dominos melted in unheroic effeminacy. Cards and chess, scandal mongering in *ridottos* i.e. mask balls and floating away in luxury formed the aristocratic way of passing one's time. This in short was the history of the eighteenth-century Venice. Laxity and licence in their ceremonious trapping swept over the waters of the city and in the darkness of its political night crept into even the nunneries and monasteries. The Oligarchs laid aside their swords in favour of enjoyment and all the gay birds of Europe flocked here to walk down the primrose path of dalliance. What attracts most in the pictures of Guardi is, that when inanition was slowly

but steadily eating into the vitals of this state of historic traditions, the nobility were not at all conscious of the futility of the life they were leading.

Nor had they any remorse either. They did neither repent nor relent. In this connection a poem of Browning comes to my mind. Duke Ferdinand passed by the window of the bride of Ricardi every day and they would exchange stolen glances at each other. They had a mad desire to elope but no decision strong enough to bring them to the plunge. The arrangements made for the elopement were not utilised and all that remained in their life was this exchange of glances. But alas the dreams of youth do not last for ever. Its rainbow colours began to fade and love to pale. To perpetuate its memory the lady installed her bust on her window and the Duke his statue in the park beneath. These went on looking at each other and love eternal took the shape of transient stone. The emptiness of their love was proved by the unfulfilment of their union. The sin of the unlit lamp and the ungirt loin they could not escape. In Browning's philosophy of life there is no room for repentance. Life must be pursued to the last limits of its object, be it one of earthly desires or heavenly devotion. No half-hearted effort for him, no relenting of the steps taken towards the goal.

It is no surprise that the Venetians of that age are now living only through the brush of the painter, though Venice today is as full of life as before. Steamers ply over its waters and electric lights of the hotels on both sides raise fantastic reflections on them. Thanks to modernity greater Venice will have even motor cars on its few streets. But the real Venice of old will always reappear in all its glory as the echoes of 'O Sole Mio' with its soft accompaniment of guitar keep tune with the shiny waves of the Grand Canal and the light from the coloured paper lantern of a passing gondola dances on them under the very shadow of ancient palazzos.

The gondolier who stands slanting on his quivering gondola like the unflickering flame of an oil-lamp—to quote a famous simile of the Sanskrit poet Kālidāsa—seems to have stepped straight out of the canvas of some immortal Italian artist. So does the weird beggar who plays mandolin for his living. Also the old Venetian in his quaint dress in the narrow by-lanes that breathe the atmosphere of his ancient city.

Yes I did fall in love with all this

* * *

No. No more shall I have anything to do with love.

Nor had anybody fallen in love with me.

This night in Venice to which my story relates was, from all counts, set for an affair of the heart. It was a rare night. The full moon was shining through my window and a mythological story of my country came to my mind. In the Mahābhārata, the great Indian epic, there is a story of an Amazonian princess. She had neither charm nor beauty but had the misfortune of falling in love with a wandering warrior. Baffled in her love this Diaua of Manipur invoked Eros and got the boon of heavenly charm and beauty for a year only. Prince Arjuna was duly enthralled but what would happen at the end of the year? Did the princess cry her heart out? Did she ask for an extension of the boon?

No. She did not. In a manner characteristic of this Ruritania on the Indo-Burma border the princess only prayed that the three hundred and sixty-fifth one be the most enchanting night of her year of grace. And so it was. The heart of the huntress was set for hunting in the most exotic way. Her raiments were the gift of the spring, her eyebrows had the angle of the bow of Eros and her name, I remember, was Chitrangada, i.e. one with a painted body.

The way the "Chitrangadas" of Venice had taken the artful aid of toilet that night it seemed that all the heroes of this Venetian evening would fall flat at the feet of beauty.

I stared at the row of cypresses through which the Grand Canal glistened and could not but come downstairs. Sitting idle and smoking aimlessly in the loggia like an American tourist was an impossibility in a night like this. Nor could I step into the hotel ristorante and gorge myself with "to night's French specialities." How could I, when the stone figures in the balustrades shone white amidst the gloom of shrubs and palms and the road to the town lay inviting between dark walls and

olive terraces purpled with violets? I could see the dark trees against the azure of the night. Overhead they joined hands and their delicate foliage caught the moonlight and made a lace work of silver and jet.

In the language of Bruno, the hero of this evening, that picture is the most attractive which is made of black and white only and in support of his statement he pointed out the dark eyes of the belles of Southern Italy. He said that in a white marble statue the most fascinating part is the pair of deep dark eyes. He said that the black eyes of our Indian girls do not shine well for the lack of Italian complexion. God alone knows which country Bruno has not visited.

The magic of that Venetian night drew me out of my hotel. I could not stay in at all. Such a night as this compels poets and lunatics out on the road. And those who are neither but are still on the road must be lovers under the magic spell of the night.

That road could lead nobody to Rome though such used to be the proverb about all roads. On both sides were gardens and houses smelling of old history. Meandering through the roads I arrived at the Grand Canal. Herein ended this path and here also started my Venetian story.

I had spent the whole day like an aristocrat. Not that I became an aristocrat for the day. It was spent in front of the incomparable paintings in the palace of the Doge, the biggest aristocrat of the past. Round me were moving excited American tourists, mostly millionaires compared to me. Probably their itinerary allotted only a day to Venice. Who knew they might have to cover the whole world in a month. Judging by their hurry and remembering the saying "To see Venice and then die" I concluded that death is not death to a tourist unless he sees Venice first.

But a night like this was not to be wasted in a casual flippant mood. Somewhere in the air was the call of Titian. Indeed it was a Titian day for me as I had spent the most of it in front of his pictures in the Doge's palazzo. Now I felt that it was a Titian night as well. The same blending of colours in the glorious Italian sky and in the salubrious waters of the Lido. Whose picture was it, that masterpiece, "Bacchus and Ariadne"? Who had the bold conception and audacious

design to create that enormous picture "Paradise", the largest in the world? Indeed, I found that I had changed Tintoretto into Titian by some unconscious mistake. However, a Titian night this for me. It was his harmony of colours which I found in the marvel of the Italian sky, on the sea shore and indeed in the playful eyes of the Italian girls also.

I had no hesitation in choosing a gondola in preference to the steam-boat which was ready on the canal. It would seem so odd to use a steam-boat and not a hand-propelled gondola in the Venetian waters. My destination was the Rialto bridge. Though a tourist myself I do not like the tribe of tourists. I hate meeting them with those offending looks of theirs. They seem to speak of money in plenty and a craze for hunting out culture. I am shy of foreigners as well, being one myself. I want to eat my spaghetti al pomodoro or macaroni Italiane undisturbed by the envious gaze of a rich elderly tourist who chuckles at a strange dish but has little appetite for it. So I drew aside and entered a humble basement cafe for my homely dinner. Here one may meet the real Italian, the native in his natural setting and not the sophisticated man of wide education. I also like the pleasant beggar-artist who invariably comes in with the madolin and plays to my restful delight. His eyes do not stare at me and ask, "Who are you, oh, stranger"?

Slowly my eyes were closing down in relief as my heart was opening itself to the music of my old beggar. He was playing an old Southern tune which seemed to give shape to all the emotions of the entire day of mine and of the evening too. Everything began to get confused in my mind and take a new shape. I clothed these ordinary Italians around me with a significance which does not lend itself to their everyday existence, with a worth they themselves can hardly dream of. They appeared to me in a different light altogether. I began to enjoy the pleasure of keeping my eyes closed and suddenly felt a very mild rap on my table. Opposite me was sitting an Italian of about fifty. Sympathy in his eyes, softness in his face and the lingering traces of a handsome male all over his body. "Permesso, signor, please excuse me, but take me as a friend. It appears you are thinking of something, probably of somebody".

What did he mean? I felt embarrassed. What would a man say if you closed your eyes while having a simple dinner in a humble wayside restaurant? I tried to smile away.

The old man said, "I have guessed right, signor, you are thinking of somebody. Quite natural in a night like this". In tender sympathy his voice became somewhat mellow and eyes soft. He went on, "I am sure the person of whom you are thinking now is also thinking of you this very moment".

Heavens! Does he mean to say that I am in love? Of course, I admitted to myself that after a whole day's sight-seeing my hair had become dishevelled like a young poet's and that I had put on a tie whose colours matched with the blue playfulness of the Venetian sky and the water of the Lido. But did that hold out any proof of falling in love? I put out another smile of dainty embarrassment. A piece of escallop and a portion of macaroni al pomodoro were still on my plate. Unobtrusively I pushed it aside.

Probably the gentleman felt approval in this action of mine. He dragged his chair near me and began in a hushed voice, "Sorry that I have disturbed your dream. But believe me, signor, I thought that here was one who would sympathise with me. I do not know why I thought so, but it is easy to find out one who is thinking in a similar line. Of course your dream is just building itself while mine has been broken. To-night, just here, in this very restaurant".

I was left without any speech. I had not begun to have any dream. Even if I had, I could not have blamed my twenty-two years. But what was the use of dispelling his own guess? What he has lost in his life is much greater than what he has guessed about me. I felt a little tenderness for him, and enquired in a deep voice, "Broken? Your dreams are broken? Alas..." I felt a gulp in my throat but my eyes became full of questions and got the better of my silence.

"Yes; they are. I don't know why I came back to my country after so many years. But I would go away very soon before my friends come to know of my return".

"Why would you go away again? Why?"

As soon as I put this question I remembered that I too have been away from my home for three years.

"Why shall I not? What have I got left here? Who who

constitutes my country, my dream, is no more. It is only me alone who remains the same”.

As he had said that his dream came to an end in this restaurant I sent a hurried glance round the room. Only one woman was there, the proprietress of this place. She was past her youth, but it was evident that once she was a beauty. Of course it also struck me that in a setting like that of to-night anybody in Italy would look beautiful.

Following my glance the old man also was looking round the room and his gaze also fastened itself on that woman. There was a faint trace of a smile as her eyebrows went up in an arch like the rainbow. His eyebrows also danced a little. It was clear that they knew each other very well. Alas, I thought, how near they are and yet how far.

“Do you know, my friend, she is my sweetheart of the past, that past which was present to me here until now? Come, let us go out somewhere else”.

I looked at her again, at her lips, those lips which had created the heaven on earth for him. There was still a lingering smile on them. We two came out in the open. There was a gondola nearby.

The beautiful courtyard of San Marco was then nearly empty but it was full of moonlight and the moon on the vast waters in front was breaking up in raptures of waves. We came down the courtyard and sat near the blue water under the starry sky.

Bruno went on with his story. By that time we had become very familiar with each other. His story was of the frustrated love of a poor man with the daughter of a well off Government servant.

Bruno—“Claretta had absorbed my whole existence like the French Claret. Her face was surrounded by wavy locks which came down her head in clusters like those very grapes from which Italian wines are extracted. I felt like drinking the wine of her lips wringing it out as if from the grapes themselves. But we are Roman Catholic”.

I—“What is the harm in that if the wine of sentiment does keep up the spirit? It was not necessary for you to drink from her lips.”

Bruno—“Not necessary? You say that it was not necessary? How old are you?”

I rapped on his arm gently and smiled—"That is beside the point. Go on."

Bruno—"I used to call Claretta my Taj. Do you know why? Because she was as white and beautiful as the marble of the Taj Mahal of your country."

"I think your human 'Taj' was more charming than the marble one".

"Right you are. But you see, Claretta still has got her marble complexion, but alas, no beauty. She has turned into stone, only stone. She has n't got any life left.

"Why? Does n't she love you any more?"

"That is immaterial" whispered Bruno. "Even if she does love me, what's the good of that?"

I was surprised, nay, staggered. Poets have always assured us of love immortal, love continuing from life to life without break. Novelists speak of endless waiting for the lover's return, reciprocation of infinite love which transcends human senses. But here was a man who was saying something different after returning from a voluntary exile due to frustrated love. Was it because he was pushed out into the wide, wide world by the lotus fingers of his beloved? My Oriental mind could not find an answer and my glances towards his moonlit face were full of questions.

Bruno continued his story.

"What could I not do for her when I was your age? I tried to make up for my lack of substance by my unsubstantial offer of love, by consistence and company. I had no presents to offer, but I offered her all my heart. Your Indian poets give garlands to their beloved and we give gardenias. Was my heart worth less than either? But I can't blame her. She was ready to be mine, but I did not get her".

"Why? Did you turn a cynic?"

"It is not easy or natural to turn a cynic in Venice. People become cynical when grapes are sour. But my town always holds out hopes".

"But does n't hope deferred make the heart sick?"

Bruno became Oriental again. He referred to the professional dancing girls of India who, in formal gatherings, go on dancing and dancing and hardly pause to care how the guests of the employer are enjoying. Bruno actually said that in

Venice the expectations of success are so great that young men wait indefinitely at the foot of the tree of desire for the ripe grapes to fall.

And so he did not turn a cynic. Not like the college students in India who achieve this mental stage as a result of reading too much of love poetry and who do not get over that stage until they actually fall in love.

"So you see, there was no reason for me to be a cynic. And if I were one, there would be no trouble for me."

"But, then, why are you in this trouble?" asked I rather hesitantly.

"Nobody is to blame. If anybody is at fault it is the clear blue sky overhead which has taken its beauty from the eyes of our Italian girls. The fault lies with this watery expanse which breaks into waves and croons away by the easements of our belles. Being an Indian you will appreciate that this playfulness of the Venetian waters is but the aquatic reflection of the sweetness of our girls."

The flowery description and diction of Bruno completely bowled me over. Of course I also had a sort of secret sympathy for him. A man in love walks in Insanity Fair. Are not all the best love poems of the world but the heart's delirium set to rhyme and music?

Most of the metaphors and expressions used by Bruno would not be intelligible or approved by the old grammarian or custodian of literary standards. But he was completely indifferent. Nor dare I question them. If I did he might at once flash out, "If you want to blame anybody don't look at me. The responsibility lies with the spring-feeling floating on the waters of the blue lagoon".

So I kept silent on that point. Who knew he might blame this young Oriental also. I gently enquired about the consequence".

He sighed and said, "The consequence was very brief, though the life thereafter does not seem to end. Claretta's father discovered us one night in moonlight. I had taken her out on a gondola and was singing to the tune of the waves when our gondola dashed against his. He was returning home and somehow escaped a disaster. You can easily guess the consequence".

"Why did n't you ask for her hand in the name of youth

and love and in the name of ('Claretta herself?'" Asked I. I also felt very much Oriental in sympathy with Bruno.

"Alas. I had no opportunity of pressing my claim. In her presence her rich father sneered at my poverty and asked me to strike a gold mine first and then think of his bambina. I swore to do so, waved away the oar and swam my way away from Venice. Claretta remained behind on my gondola—alone".

Bruno went on with the subsequent history. He had visited many parts of the wide world in search of fortune. He had come to India also just for seeing Taj Mahal. I knew the story that a disconsolate European was found sitting helplessly by the tomb of the Indian Empress day after day for several months. The guide at Taj Mahal had told me that during my visit to this embodiment of tears in marble. Bruno claimed that he was that European. Then he went to Malay and earned a fortune by speculation in rubber. He returned to his native Venice only yesterday and discovered his Taj in the humble proprietress of this lowly ristorante. Claretta's father had died leaving no bequest for her and her rich suitors left her in the lurch. In wounded vanity she started the life of a working girl. Marriage ceased to be the career for her.

In almost indecent joy I cried out, "Hurrah, you can now have her. Go and do so. Do establish life in your marble memorial".

His answer broke forth in a sad smile, "Therein lies my defeat".

I could not understand. I could see the boatman standing on the distant gondola like the quivering flame of an earthen village lamp of my country. I could also feel Bruno's tale shining like the evening star in the firmament of my Indian mind. But what he meant to say I could not understand.

I was probably getting a little impatient. What else could a young man do in this situation? Interrupting his silence I volunteered, "She is still unmarried. Her father can't stand in your way. You have now got the means to marry. Claretta is yours for the asking as far as I understand".

"You won't understand, my friend. You are too young. You can create but I cannot".

"What do you mean?"

"It's simple. I remain the same old self with the same heart, outlook and desire. But I failed to figure out that the sweetheart of my dreams has outlived her youth and spring-time and is now old. I came to see an angel and found an apparition. Alas, I was not out fortune-hunting for this Claretta".

"Nor are you young any more. Both of you left your youth behind long ago. Who knows she also may be thinking that the same Bruno does not exist any more".

"No, she won't think in that strain. She did not bar her mind's door to all changes and keep it a close preserve for me. She did not stand up against the tide of change just in my remembrance. She has grown up in her natural environment".

"Did you never notice your advancing years even in a mirror? Did you never realise that perhaps unconsciously you also were changing?"

"No, I did not. If I had done, I would not have rushed back home like this. I would have been eager to accept Claretta as she is without any second thought".

Strange indeed. What a line of argument.

It was difficult to contain myself any longer. I become almost brutal in the frankness of my question.

"Did you ever really love her?"

"Did I not?" Questioned back Bruno with the serenity of a philosopher and the sentiment of a poet. "How else could I tolerate my empty days abroad and fight for bare existence? Whose light showed me the way through the East? Who supplied all the inspiration?"

"But she remains the same. The change you notice now is just a biological affair. That is natural for both of you, for everybody".

"This is beyond argument, my friend, You can criticise but cannot create again. Take, for example, the luscious vines. Last week a particular bunch of grapes was very inviting indeed; can it now have the same value for me just because it happens to be the same bunch? That taste and that juice have gone and so have my dreams. You have seen life through books and don't understand that my clock came to a stop when

I was twentyfive. I can't put it forward now by another twentyfive years. A great mistake, this home-coming of mine''.

There could be no argument after this. I sat in silence. For how long I do not know. The moon rose far above in the sky and moved away in another direction. Streams of moonlight wove magic on the waves of the blue waters. I sat numbed with pain and sympathy in one corner of the courtyard of San Marco, the courtyard where the ancient lover Casanova used to write love-letters to his countless lovers to the tune of the ceaseless humming of the pigeons swarming round him.

Gradually I began to feel a tender sympathy for Bruno's theory also. Youth is of course the time for dreams, but time itself does not allow one to sit on the banks of its stream and wait. It carried Bruno along with its course and now he found himself moved by love no more.

Quite naturally, I thought. For the lips that once were like the petals in the dewy morning before even the warmth of the sun could reach them are now like the withered ones when the summer is gone.

Time does not wait for anybody, not even for love. To-day is the hard reality and will turn unreal and be gone as soon as to-morrow comes. Poets have sung of the mystery of love eternal but man craves for the music of the love of to-day. How dare I say that the latter is less precious than the former?

Suddenly I noticed that Bruno was not by my side. Obviously he had felt embarrassed at this unpremeditated disclosure of his secret and had not thought it fit to disturb my reverie. I drew this much consolation that the magic touch of my sympathy could open up the portals of his heart. Heaven alone knows how many men in this endless chain of ages had to leave their homes and sweethearts in search of fortunes, to lead wandering lives from country to country. And what for? Only to find in the end the end of their dreams. Unconsciously I sighed softly. So did the Bridge of Sighs. The whole night seemed to respond to that sigh.

Early next morning Bruno's story came back to my mind in a welter. His theory and approach to life were wrong. His life would remain frustrated for this mistake. So would that of Claretta. What was the good of my study of Shelley and Tagore if I could not convince Bruno of his mistake? So

I must find him out urgently. Men generally become sentimental and unpractical in moonlight. But daylight brings back reality. He must be convinced of his mistake that very morning.

A great mistake this, his assessment of me as a bookish youth of twentytwo. He did not know how often you can derive truth and light from books. After a hurried breakfast I rushed to the Canal. This time I had no objection to the engine-driven boat. I should have to find out Bruno's address from that restaurant by the Rialto. Who knew he might have started for his exile again by that time.

I naturally hesitated to go into Claretta's restaurant and ask her about Bruno's address. She might feel shy. She might misunderstand. She might realise that taking advantage of a moonlit night I had ferreted out their secret.

Discreetly I asked the shopkeeper of a trattoria nearby. "Do you know, Signor, the address of old Bruno who came yesterday? Bruno, who returned from abroad only yesterday?"

The shopkeeper looked surprised. "Bruno? There is only one Bruno here. A great pal of the old woman of the restaurant. He comes here daily. A great gambler and a veteran drinker. A champion, I say".

A chuckle and a smacking of the lips followed this disrespectful statement.

I became impatient. "No, not that Bruno. I mean the Bruno who returned from abroad only yesterday".

Si, signor, it's the same man. A bit of a scholar no doubt, but he roams in many foreign lands with a few glasses of chianti inside him. Did he have his drinks last night on you, signor?"

Now I remembered. Yes, he did. Eager to hear his story I had hurriedly paid his wine bill last night.

I did not want to hear anything more and slowly withdrew.

Slowly the heat of the sun grew stronger. Nothing could interest me. I started walking about with a heavy heart. Ultimately I left behind the Lido front and sat down in the shade of a cypress in a garden. The sky was blue, so was the water and a tinge of blue was in my mind. The gentle damp breeze gradually wiped off my physical and mental ennui. I reconstructed myself.

That power of reconstruction is the truth in a man's life. Bruno has made a fool of me. So has the rapturous full moon night of Venice. But let that be a case of pure befooling. Let some wise reader try to put the whole episode down to a few glasses of chianti on my part. The wisdom and sobriety of ages will eye me with half-amused derision. The world is too worried with itself to believe in another in which Titian colours the sky and love colours the heart and a foreigner extends his sympathy to a stranger. One must be practical and business-like and should not run about lending credulous ears to any story except what the Baedeker's has to say about the princess in the palace. That simply is not respectable.

But I hold on to the truth of my story. How can I help it? Sleep was eluding me as Bruno's story went on disturbing my mind at night. Walking restlessly in my room I wrote a poem for Bruno to present it to his Taj.

Love born of dusty earth
Gave immortality to death;
In helplessness gave birth
To your message and breath.
In your marble heart, O dear,
I leave in moonlit ink
My life's true signature
On Eternity's brink.

How can I help believing in that story when the moon shines over the blue lagoon under the Rialto and weaves magic round the floating dreams of gondolas? Memories of Venice do not often come back to me. The campanile of San Marco is fast losing itself in the misty morning light in which I saw it last. I have also persuaded myself to dismiss stories of unrequited love lightly from my mind. Never again may I come of a midnight to my room with a touch of dream in my eyes and a tenderness of sympathy in my heart. Indeed the Titian colour does not now-a-days appear in my horizon. Already, as I hurry through the day, memories of a frustrated love story hardly ever break through and remind me of that night in Venice. Probably Venetian nights are illusions. But that night was not.

FAR FROM THE MADDING CROWD

To-day is my holiday from the maddening civilisation. One full day's escape from it. I wonder aimlessly in a Dutch village where milk flows and butter abounds. Yes, milk and butter, honey and cheese, eggs and fish, cotton and silk, a few glass beads and toys, some cottage handicrafts almost complete the list. You get here something like the replica of a village market on the slopes of the hills in India's eastern frontier in a more sensitized setting of colour in an European background. You find the usual higgling about prices, the usual crowd in chocolate stalls.

To-day is a special festive day for this tiny hamlet. Each one of the villagers had been to the church in the morning. The afternoon is for marketing and for enjoying the bright warmth of a sunny May day. The village maidens are all in black silk with white frilled bonnets and wicker baskets in hand. They wear shoes of the pattern of a wooden boat. This is their festive dress. This gala day does not however entice them to be modern in their dresses. They stick to their old costume. These rustic people are so simple and quiet. You can find no trace of grievance on their faces. They are like flowers touched by God's own hands, fresh and smiling, free and full. I feel sad that I cannot go back to those young days of yore. *O Jeunesse heroique du monde*. I suppress a sigh.

I could not take myself away from this Dutch scene that evening. I cancel my return to Belgium. An unknown and unsung Dutch fishing village attracts me. Perhaps I would not have another opportunity of inhaling saltish brine with the smell of fresh fish. I feel there is something in the company of these foreign friends in that small village where electricity is unknown. I sit with them to hear their simple elementary stories. They go in trawlers and fishing boats. It is not often that their catch is a legion. But they do not hanker for more. They feel satisfied. Their world is small. Sometimes in a stormy night they would perhaps lose track of their course and their families and friends anxiously wait for them on the beaches. Waves would lap against the sand and spray them heavily. Old men would recount their own tales of struggle against the sea and what they would do in a night

like this. Mothers and wives and sweethearts would keep looking on and tell the young ones their own favourite sagas of the sea. The storm would wail, thunders roll and heavens creak. Hearts would beat in anxious prayer. I tell them what the housewives do in another little known corner of the earth, how the village maids of Bengal float little lamps on the angry waves in appeasement of Lord Varuna (Neptune) and read their fortune in the fate of the floating lamps. They get interested and ask if I have many more stories like this. But I am here to lend my ears and not my speech. I want to hear them and imbibe the very simplicity of their lives.

This part of the world is only thirty to forty miles from the other side of the sea and it gives me a cloistered shelter from the very modernity of a brave new world beyond. You can feel this in many places in Holland and Belgium where you can go back to the middle ages in a trice and forget that you are in the midst of the twentieth century clamour and commercial civilisation. (There is a big center of trade. Yet in its little hilltop castle I can forget that I am not in the Flanders of the fourteenth century. I see time almost rolling back. I come across seven such heirlooms of history in seven hundred years. The very atmosphere of the Crusades seems to revive. Armoured knights are just on their horseback with shining armours and long drawn swords. Yet if I peep out of from these forts I find the world's commerce represented on the stock exchange and not the Jews and the knights bargaining for their ducats and gilders.

A little away are two old world thirteenth century nunneries. They are detached from the rest of the city by high walls, an Imperium in Imperio, a relic of the middle ages. Narrow streets intersperse, odd buildings still stand. Nuns and Sisters pray in silence. One of them receives me. I feel my presence sanctified by their blessing. That bare room, that silent invocation of Him who is the God of all, that dedicated human soul make me feel not only the Mother's touch but the oneness of the world. She belongs to another epoch. Her dress, her mode of living, her cloistered seclusion remind me of other days. Even the inevitable dust of the Netherlands dare not penetrate here.

Suddenly I discover here in the twelfth century church of St. Bavon the Van Dyke brothers' "Reception of the

Mysterious Sheep'', the best production of Flemish art. Who knew that John of Gaunt was born here! To us he is Shakespeare's creation.

Please do not run away with the idea that there is no modernism in Belgium. Brussels is Petit Paris. You get the same sparkling amusements, similar palaces, boulevards, cafes. You hear the same old tongue. Yet that is not all. You feel the difference as well. It is true that in historic evolution and development of fine arts, in the commerce of fineries Brussels is only the little sister of Paris but mark it that this similarity is an adaptation and not an imitation. If there is any imitation anywhere it is in the town planning, modern artistic tastes and in the urbanity of its inhabitants. One finds Flemish and French spoken side by side through the length and breadth of the land. Only that Brussels has adopted the more cosmopolitan and cultured tongue.

There are two institutions which preserve the individuality of Flanders—the Guild House and the Town Hall. One is for commerce and the other for municipal administration. You will find these two in every Belgian city and these buildings are generally the finest specimens of Belgian art in the city. A beautiful specimen of Gothic Art is preserved in the Skipper's House of Ghent. Each Town Hall reminds you of the days gone by. They belong to history. The one at Brussels and the 'Grande Place' in front of it witnessed some pathetic scenes of the first phase of the Netherlands' War of Independence and of their struggle with Spain.

The Belgians are generally religious minded. Their War of Independence began as a religious protest. But one cannot but admire how silently it has permeated into their life. They have progressed much in trade and commerce but their mind is still unsophisticated. The very atmosphere of the middle ages which they preserve make this apparent contradiction in the appraisement of values possible in their lives. This basic fact is brought home to me in Malines, the centre of their religious activities. The most noticeable characteristic is that the silent religious mindedness of the people is widespread but it hardly clashes with the state. The Catholic party of to-day is hardly a religious party in the mediaeval sense.

The procession of the 'Holy Blood' is perhaps the most famous of such processions in all Europe. The first Monday

after the 2nd May is a holy day sacred to the memory of "Our Lord on horseback", and devout Catholics from every corner flock to pay their homage. The pageantry of the procession depicts Biblical stories, the Old Testament, the New Testament, Christ's torture on the Cross and other episodes of his life. Then comes the Count of Flanders with flourish and trumpets followed by the Bishops and the City Fathers. Last though not the least in the pageant is the solemn entry of the "Holy Blood" in a golden vase; a symbolic representation of the "Brothers in faith of the Great Blood. It takes two hours for this procession to pass. Bells chime. Crowds kneel. Bishops bless. It reminds you of the Crusades. The then Count of Flanders got this emblem of blood in appreciation of his undying bravery and gallantry in the second Crusade. He handed this over to the town of Bruges and its City Fathers still hold it in sacred trust for the mass with faith and reverence. You cannot but be struck with the fact that in the Netherlands there is hardly any bigotry in the name of religion or any attempt to commercialise it.

Bruges is the Venice of the North. In its canals still flow the Middle Ages. Through the centuries it has no doubt changed and there is an obvious attempt to modernise it. But people still flock to see its canals, palaces and cathedrals. It is still the dreamy old town. It has not yet reached the modern age. Within three decades it passed through the baptism of fire of two successive World Wars. You can go to Ypres, Dixmoud, Newport, all of them famous battle fields near at hand. You can roam round the trenches which are still there. You can feel the creeps in the meandering underground dug outs as if round the corner you might meet a Boche with a bayonet. Yet all these did not corrode the soul of Bruges. It merely touched the fringe of its life. It bowed before the blast and plunged in mediaeval thoughts again. No ultra modern art has developed in Bruges nor have you got smooth macadamised roads. At the door steps of old low roofed houses in narrow winding streets work the old women on lace and care not for the modern visitors. Bruges still goes to sleep at the end of the day as it did in the twelfth century with the lullaby of the carillon on the top of the belfry. The jazz of the ball room does not interrupt her quiet repose.

As I board the ship at Ostend and cast a lingering look at the casino of the Kursaal, where youth and beauty dance and gamble, and look again at the sand-swept sea I still hear the last refrain of Bruges.

‘Somewhere a voice is calling’.

FAREWELL FROM HEAVEN

"The heavenly garland withers on my neck", bewailed a cursed god while bidding goodbye to heaven. He weighed the good points of both heaven and earth and preferred the latter as gods have no feelings, no bonds of attachment for others. The earth on the other hand is green with tears and tender with affection. As the cursed god's time for departure approaches the heavenly garland withers on his neck.

So does the garland of my youthful imaginations. My stay in Europe has been like a happy dream. Not a very long period this, but it seems to be a re-incarnation. From beyond the shores of a sea long left behind I am looking on a new sunrise in another horizon. A plaintive silence reigns in my mind. It is time for a stock taking.

I remember how once in a full moon night I floated a flower eastwards on the blue Mediterranean at Valencia redolent with the mild fragrance of oranges. That was a dedication to my India. I also remember how ardently in a dream I started towards my country on foot across the ocean; with each foot step on the waters a lotus would wake up from beneath and support my step. In this way I reached my native soil but alas as soon as I touched it the dream was gone. Now as the time for my departure approaches anxiety mixes up with ardour and I experience a strange feeling.

I cannot say how much I have changed; but what happens if any country does not want to understand that? But change I must. If anybody does not alter after close contact with Europe, with her versatile expression of life he must be a mere dead matter and not a man. But why Europe alone? Even if I had stayed within India nobody would have been able to appraise the changes undergone by me due to contact with new ideas and new force. Those changes would have been a continuous process of daily development. Hardly anybody would have noticed them.

No current of ideas these days remains confined to one area or country. Ideas have wings and break through all barriers of convention and orthodoxy. Our world is contracting fast and geographical limits disappearing. But when I come up from the mighty whirlpool of European ideas there will be a shock of surprise among my people. My changes cannot escape

their notice and they will stare askance. Still more distressing will be the judgment that a fine example has come back from abroad without any change at all. Such a conclusion will be an insult to my dynamic mind. What has happened to me is not a change but an evolution. Let that process continue throughout my life.

I shall come back home. But shall I not perceive a call from behind? Will nothing distract me like the bride about to leave her father's home for good? Will this temporary abode of mine in Europe not come back to my mind ever and anon? Through this window of mine overlooking a suburban street I have watched the procession of men and women day and night and have imagined their lives as idylls. By this window I have heard the faint murmur of the busy London concourse wafted in like the splash of water under a moving boat on the river; over this window the mellow autumn sun has put its paling signature day after day. Sitting by that window I have felt the pleasure of new acquaintances, new surprises fading and ending tenderly like the last rays in the evening sky. How can I forget that window of mine? How can I forget those golden days of hope and success at the end of which I would rest my head on the table, relax and realise myself while only the evening fire lights up the room and the lilacs greet me with a faint fragrance? Oblivion cannot obliterate them, nor distance disavow.

But Europe has no serenity in her mind. She has prosperity but no stability, power but no peace. Changefulness every day, enthronement of the new every morning give her no time to consolidate herself. I remember that popular song,

“PARIS, STAY THE SAME”.

But Paris does not. Indeed she cannot. Europe is not India, deep in meditation, self-possessed and immutable. Europe must float down the stream of changefulness. Her destiny lies in paths new and untrodden. Her future cannot find consummation in the present.

The endless festival of life I have seen in Europe is not her last word. In it lies the tune of the dance of death also. In the thoughtless unreasoned inexplicable footsteps of the Master Dancer are announced not only the rhythm of life but that of death also. During every war the dance of destruc-

tion is on. It may get going again any time. Creation and destruction, two of the activities of God, both find ample play in Europe. Probably on India lies the sacred task of the third function, that of preservation. That is perhaps why century after century she is immersed in herself, far from the ceaseless rush forward. Change for its own sake is a crazy craving, a futile fashion in Europe. The waves of changefulness and restlessness are however lashing not a little against the shores of India. If one epithet could adequately connote a continent I would describe Europe as ever new. Not that she has remained in the same stage of newness for ever. In every epoch she puts on a fresh mantle. The stream of time washes it away before it can wear out.

I have not been able to know Europe to her last. Many a picture of her endless variety from the infinite festival of life to the impending pageant of death has still remained unseen. But can you see through everything to its last? Have I been able to know finally even my own mind? My life meanders its way to an unknown destination, like an ocean-bound river. It touches in its course the banks of many countries, some stony with apathy and others green with sympathy. If I come again to my youthful pilgrimage of Europe I shall make so many fresh discoveries. She will go forward and so will my mind. For neither is stagnant and immobile. I shall make a fresh acquaintance with the ever new. Europe is not like the lily of many petals. She is a flower that always unfolds a new petal, each one distinct in its charm and fragrance. Each has a separate identity. To be able to count my days in expectation of that great variety is no mean fortune.

But however charming she might be, Europe is not mine. My destiny does not lie here, but in my own country. What I have got here has made my mind fertile, but its functions originated in India. Though I have had enough here that does not constitute the whole. My life cannot find its fulfilment here. Here nobody will pray for me or light an evening lamp under the sacred tree for my welfare. Just like that of the god of the story cursed out of heaven my departure will not be sanctified by tears, gentle tears of love and affection.

On the other hand my country also has probably gone ahead of me in many ways. She will try me before accepting me just as I shall scan her in a new light. I shall see her in

the light of a new knowledge that all the hope and truth and beauty one lives for do not necessarily exist in the country of one's birth and bringing up. At the same time the soft smile and tender affection of my neglected earthly mother will gradually suffuse the bright illumination across the seas and enable me to bear up with ease my absence from Europe. Mine will be a transformation.

Still I shall feel the pangs of separation from Europe at every step. Particularly when I get entangled in the moss-grown stagnant pool that rural India is. There will be no heavenly relief of floating down the sportive luminous stream of life, of forgetting myself and my care-worn surroundings. No joyous playfulness for me, nor unbounded enthusiasm for life, nor any escape from my own self. As now, there will be crowds in the streets and unflaunting shyness in my mind. But the pleasure of anonymity will not be there. I shall remain the same self; so will my impressionable mind. But the environs will change. The demands of daily existence, the dreary roundabout of apathy and artificiality will circumscribe my inner self.

But will that really happen? I have spent in Europe the most impressionable years of my life, the like of which I shall never get again. I may get back everything but not that period during which I created the infinite heaven on a finite earth, when I developed my individuality far above the plane of all doubts and questions, when I fell in love with life at first sight. That joy will shine like the morning glory far above the misery of my daily drudgery. Admittedly many a golden feature of Europe will be found to be dross when tested in the touchstone of my own land. Still the beauty she has lent to my vision, the touch she has imparted to my life will survive untarnished for ever and ever.

My Eastern horizon remains lit up with the glow of the West.